DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN
A PLAN FOR CONTINUED PROGRESS

PREPARED FOR THE
BROOKLYN CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE
AND
HOWARD GOLDEN
BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT
BY
REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION
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This Report is a step toward the further enhancement of Downtown Brooklyn. It outlines Downtown Brooklyn’s strengths and the challenges to be addressed. Based on these strengths and challenges, a strategy for improvement is presented.

The 1983 study of Downtown Brooklyn by Regional Plan Association is widely recognized for influencing major development projects in the area during the mid- and late-1980s. While they had many positive effects, one of the most important results of development projects such as MetroTech Center, Pierrepoint Plaza and Livingston Plaza was to dramatically increase the size and influence of the Downtown Brooklyn business community. MetroTech Center is an excellent example of new development rejuvenating a critical downtown area.

Thirteen years after the first study, this new plan for Downtown Brooklyn attempts to harness the new strength of the area’s business community with the existing Downtown pillars of higher education, cultural institutions, government agencies and retail shops and services. By working together under this new blueprint, the leaders of this vital and powerful community can more effectively plan for the area’s growth into the next century.

This Project is a public-private partnership headed by the office of Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden and the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, through its affiliate, the Downtown Brooklyn Development Association. The project is supported by funds from the Empire State Development Corporation, the Brooklyn Borough President’s Office, the New York City Department of Business Services, as well as from key Downtown Brooklyn businesses; Banco Popular, Brooklyn Union, Chase Manhattan Bank, Citibank, Consolidated Edison Company of New York, Forest City Ratner Companies, NYNEX, and Securities Industry Automation Corporation.
(SIAC). Funds to print this final report were generously donated by Pfizer Inc. The project was staffed by Regional Plan Association (RPA), a non-profit civic organization that has been planning for the New York Metropolitan Region since 1922. Regional Plan Association's purview includes all of New York City and 26 counties around it in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. In this project RPA is concentrating on one small portion, Downtown Brooklyn, because of the importance to the whole region of strengthening cities and their downtowns and because Downtown Brooklyn has the potential to become a new kind of modern metropolitan center, an example to the entire country.

RPA proposes that the Tri-State Metropolitan Region should, through a broad array of strategies and initiatives, invest in its regional downtowns—urban centers of critical importance to the future of the region. These regional downtowns need to foster new activities and provide civic amenities to gain significant economic development and growth in the next quarter century.

This new kind of urban center makes the most of its diversity—of activities, of skills, of cultures. In the past, downtowns flourished because they were centers of economic activity and major nodes of public transportation. Today, neither economic concentration nor dependence on public transit remain the primary reasons for downtowns. Any single firm or activity could function almost anywhere. What gives a downtown its advantage is that many different—but related—activities are there. The new economy is heavily based on creativity and requires rapid adjustment to change. Creativity flourishes where many people, thinking in different ways about similar subjects, meet informally, often unexpectedly.

Downtowns provide that kind of setting and can again become the most efficient and satisfying locations for business—if they are organized for it.

What strength or niche does Downtown Brooklyn have that makes or could make it a unique place to do business? Can it leverage the science and information-based assets of its universities to incubate new products and services for export to the global economy? As an integral part of the Tri-State Metropolitan Region's economy, can Downtown Brooklyn upgrade its transit lines to improve accessibility? How will its increasingly diverse labor force participate in the new economy?

The goal of this project is to catalog all of Downtown Brooklyn's assets and integrate them into a new plan for the area, with clearly-defined objectives to guide future development.

The Study Area is outlined in Figure 1, along with the nearby areas which contribute to Downtown's success.

This Document is based on several steps in a strategic planning process:

- **Building an Awareness** in the Downtown Brooklyn community that a strategic plan is necessary to formulate a new series of development objectives.

- **Formation of a Resource Coalition** to provide expertise and input throughout the process and the “ownership” necessary to move the plan toward implementation. A Steering Committee comprised of business, educational, cultural, nonprofit and government leaders was formed. A small working group representing the larger Steering Committee was chosen to work closely with RPA.

- **Research and Interviews** were undertaken by RPA, involving some hundred interviews, a number of community meetings, and an intensive research and data-gathering effort. This outreach effort also helped to crystallize a series of general goals which provided direction to the planning process. The Report uses these general goals to evaluate the various forces at work in Downtown Brooklyn: Strengths which help it toward these general goals; and Challenges which must be overcome.

- **The Recommendations** are the strategies which should be undertaken so that these general goals become reality. They spring directly from the strengths and challenges identified in the report.
Summary: Strengths and Challenges

Downtown Brooklyn has all the ingredients that a strong downtown needs. In fact, the area has greater assets than most of the nation’s downtowns:

- Excellent Location
- Concentration of Major Activities
- Regional Transportation and Communications Hub
- World-Class Arts and Cultural Institutions
- Significant Recent Progress and Accomplishments
- Committed Leadership
- Diversity of People
- Attractive Buildings and Public Spaces
- Appealing Adjacent Neighborhoods

Despite these strong assets, the tremendous growth of recent years has slowed. This project identified the obstacles to further growth and to the fullest efficiency and enjoyment of Downtown’s activities:

- Negative Image
- Lack of Diverse Shopping
- National Attitudes and Economy
- High New York City Costs
- Threats to Transportation Infrastructure
- Incoherent Design
- Obsolete Office Buildings
- Unsupportive City Policy
- Adjacent Pockets of Poverty

Since World War II, almost all U.S. downtowns have lost jobs and high quality services—if not in absolute number, at least relative to the rest of their metropolitan areas. Until the 1980s, Downtown Brooklyn was caught in the same urban downdraft. All but one of Downtown’s department stores closed. Long Island University and the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) were struggling to stay afloat. But in the 1980s, Brooklyn reversed the trend, gaining jobs and construction investment rapidly, along with New York City and the rest of the Tri-State Metropolitan Region. Now, how can Downtown Brooklyn make the most of its recent growth to enhance all elements of Downtown and attract further activities? This report discusses the strengths and challenges of Downtown Brooklyn from two perspectives: (1) how current area users assess particular conditions Downtown; and (2) whether these conditions would tend to attract or dissuade those not yet involved to choose to invest, study, work or shop in Downtown Brooklyn. The introductory section offers broad analysis, followed by detailed analysis of critical conditions for Downtown Brooklyn to address.

Strengths

Excellent Location

Downtown Brooklyn is just two subway stops from Wall Street, making Lower Manhattan closer to Downtown Brooklyn than it is to Midtown. The corporations that recently chose Downtown Brooklyn for large installations—Chase Manhattan, SIAC, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and Bear Stearns—and the several government agencies in Downtown Brooklyn—NYC Transit Authority, NYC Board of Education, NYPD Public Safety Answering Center, NYC Department of Information and Telecommunications Technology, NYC Department of Finance, NYC Fire Department and New York State’s Labor Department—are tightly linked to Lower Manhattan. From RPA’s regional perspective, Downtown Brooklyn is part of the region’s Central Business District, and this regional Central Business District is the world’s foremost global business headquarters.

Concentration of Major Activities

Downtown Brooklyn’s economy is based on solid industries: the high tech support of global financial industries; the state and federal judicial systems; non-profit service organizations; city and state government headquarters and services; utilities; higher education; and retailing for a great portion of the borough. Finance is among the Tri-State Metropolitan Region’s strongest industries, competing well with other regions of the nation and world.

Five higher education institutions—Long Island University, NYC Technical College, Polytechnic University, Brooklyn Law School, St. Francis College—are within Downtown and two more are within easy access—Pratt Institute and St. Joseph’s College. Higher education is not just a successful industry; it is a contributor to the strengths of all the other industries through cooperative research, education, training and technical assistance. For example, various centers and departments of Polytechnic University work with the financial industries, manufacturers and other businesses throughout the tri-state area and with New York City agencies. Long Island University has a Small Business Institute that provides graduate student assistance for very small firms. NYC Technical College and Polytechnic University tailor training courses for individual businesses. Many law students work in the Brooklyn District Attorney’s office, private law offices and Downtown’s courthouses.

Two major hospitals are on the edges of Downtown. Long Island College Hospital provides health care services to some Downtown organizations and has a satellite health
center at One Red Cross Plaza. Brooklyn Hospital provides services to many Brooklyn communities and is considering ways to better serve Downtown organizations. Long Island University, specializing in health care education, has built a new Health Sciences Center.

**Regional Transportation and Communications Hub**

Downtown Brooklyn is a hub of New York City’s extensive subway system; 14 subway lines and 16 stations lie within the study area. There is also a terminal of the Long Island Railroad, which connects Downtown Brooklyn with the suburban communities of Nassau and Suffolk counties. Seventeen bus lines converge on Downtown from all over Brooklyn. In addition, licensed private van services serve Downtown. Fiber optic investments support large-scale, state-of-the-art electronic communications, primarily tied to the financial industries. Few, if any, downtowns in the world have as good transit access to surrounding areas or are as prepared for advanced computers and telecommunication.

**World-Class Arts and Cultural Institutions**

Several major cultural institutions are within or close to Downtown Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the NYC Transit Museum. Other arts and cultural organizations include the Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn Arts and Cultural Association (BACA), Rotunda Gallery, Bargemusic, The Anchorage, 653 Fulton and Arts at St. Ann’s. The Fund for the Borough of Brooklyn, which promotes arts, cultural and communication programming throughout the Borough, is also located in Downtown Brooklyn. The city’s largest business library is in Downtown Brooklyn, and the main branch of the Brooklyn Public Library is nearby.

**Significant Recent Progress and Accomplishments**

A table of Recent Achievements, such as the successful development of MetroTech Center, is on page 12. Few places in the U.S. have recorded such substantial improvements in such a short time.

**Committed Leadership**

Downtown Brooklyn’s leaders—in education, culture, business and government—know each other, have established a number of cooperative arrangements, and have indicated in interviews that they would welcome more closely coordinated interaction. The Fulton Mall Improvement Association and MetroTech Business Improvement District are examples of formal organizations achieving substantial improvements in Downtown conditions, and they cooperate with each other. In addition, these leaders are committed to assisting the surrounding communities. For example, MetroTech businesses have formed the city’s first Business Advisory Committee to a local school district (#13). MetroTech Center employees provide tutoring, organize career days and bring young people into their offices for career mentoring. Several of these companies offer college scholarships, help upgrade technology in schools, and support the Downtown Brooklyn Training and Employment Council.

**Diversity of People**

The United States must adjust rapidly as our country becomes far more diverse in race and ethnicity than any nation has ever been. People seem inclined to live with this diversity without melting cultures into a sameness or allowing cultural differences to block equal economic and social opportunity. We keep our differences but play on the same team. Downtowns, then, become an important setting; that is where we all must mix to share economic opportunity even if we live separately in residential communities. A very diverse population already comes to Downtown Brooklyn, providing the opportunity to achieve this difficult but essential social goal.

**Attractive Buildings and Public Spaces**

Borough Hall Park in the center, along with several small parks and large Fort Greene Park on one edge, provide more grass, trees and bushes than most downtowns have. MetroTech Commons is a popular new public plaza. Prospect Park is 10 minutes away by subway or bus. Borough Hall, the Post Office and the Dime and Williamsburgh Savings Banks are important historic landmarks. In addition, there are many fine older office and retail buildings throughout Downtown.

**Appealing Adjacent Neighborhoods**

The residential neighborhoods surrounding Downtown Brooklyn include households of every income level living in historic brownstone houses as well as middle-, moderate- and low-income apartment buildings. These well-organized, politically active neighborhoods are walk-to-work communities for many Downtown Brooklyn workers.
Challenges

Negative Image

Starting, as many outsiders do, with a media image of Brooklyn as old “inner city,” and therefore supposedly fraught with problems of poverty, crime and racial tension, people can be especially sensitive to signs that those conditions exist. Studies show that fear of crime is fueled in public places by signs of neglect—graffiti, trash on the streets, aggressive peddlers, public drunkenness, empty lots, large numbers of people hanging out. Conditions in subway stations, through which about half the visitors to Downtown Brooklyn arrive, are especially important because underground confined spaces can add to fear. These physical conditions undoubtedly exaggerate the actual danger of crime. For example, a report by the Chase Manhattan security division calls the crime rate comparable to Lower Manhattan, though it seems likely that most people perceive Brooklyn as the more dangerous. Recent surveys by Long Island University students of college students at the seven institutions in and near Downtown found they do little in Downtown other than go to school because of safety concerns.

Lack of Diverse Shopping

Downtown employees tell us they are dissatisfied with the goods and services available, and residents in surrounding communities say they seldom shop in Downtown Brooklyn, except at Macy’s (formerly A&S). Dissatisfaction with retailing is an obstacle to attracting more firms to Downtown Brooklyn and to keeping people Downtown for other activities. At the same time, merchants apparently are prospering by serving large numbers of shoppers on Fulton Mall throughout the day. With high rents and high traffic, there is little incentive for merchants to change what seems to be working. How can Downtown employees and nearby residents be better served by retailing? (In the LIU students’ surveys of shoppers—many of whom come from other parts of Brooklyn—22% were dissatisfied with quality of service and 14% were dissatisfied with prices.)

National Attitudes and Economy

Two trends that are damaging downtowns across the nation are the country’s anti-urban bias and the recent economic recession. The majority of American young adults—in decision-making positions now—did not grow up in cities and saw them primarily in decline. Because violent crime rates are high nationwide and particularly in cities, many people fear the informal coming together of diverse people that is the greatest asset of downtowns. Furthermore, RPA projects continuing slow growth for the Tri-State Metropolitan Region over the next decade. Conditions are in place for more rapid growth over the following decade if the region retains its world-wide leadership in financial and creative industries: its major firms already have slimmed down employment to increase efficiency. Now is the time to prepare for growth.

High New York City Costs

Most business leaders acknowledge that New York City is a high-cost place to live and do business. These costs are in part due to high taxes caused by federal and state governments leaving much of the cost of providing vital services to the city government. In the end, these costs threaten the stability of existing businesses and make it difficult to attract new business.

Threats to Transportation Infrastructure

While existing public transportation makes Downtown Brooklyn accessible, the Transit Authority still acknowledges that a “state of good repair” could not be achieved until 2002—even if capital budgets remain at the level they have been. City-wide installation of computerized information technology (or “smart transit”) will take even longer. For motorists, there is the specter of the Gowanus Expressway being out of service for 6 to 8 years. Some of the one-in-four who arrive in Downtown by car complained of difficulty in finding parking they perceive as safe in a survey done by LIU students. The Brooklyn Museum has found that many city residents who would
like to visit the museum do not come because they do not want to use the subway and there is no bus service from much of the city.

**Incoherent Design**

Because downtowns are designed to bring large numbers of people together, they are necessarily dense, man-made environments. To be pleasant, good design is essential both in the buildings and the spaces between them. While much of Downtown's architecture is handsome, many buildings have been covered with ugly fronts or allowed to deteriorate. Many potentially pleasant spaces are punctuated with neglected or ugly spots. And the several sections of Downtown do not come together with an identifiable "sense of place." A related problem is created by the significant distances between facilities—distances greater than people typically walk without convenient, inexpensive transit. Downtown is visually and psychologically separated from some of its adjoining neighborhoods as well, such as the blocks separating Boerum Hill and Fulton Mall. Given the American bias against them, cities have to be gems to compete. Brooklyn has the raw material to be as likable as Boston, Seattle or San Francisco—cities that Americans like—but it will require a great deal of attention to aesthetics and design for Downtown Brooklyn to achieve this status. Among the ugly, annoying and hazardous aspects of Downtown are the wide thoroughfares dividing it: Adams Street-Boerum Place, Flatbush Avenue and Cadman Plaza West.

**Obsolete Office Buildings**

The rapid adoption of new technology by business and government has made it difficult or impossible for many organizations to occupy old office buildings. The resulting vacancies weaken not only the real estate market, but also the retailing and ambiance of the Court Street and Livingston Street areas. Downtown Brooklyn has several such buildings for which new uses should be found. Since obsolete buildings are a city-wide problem being addressed by municipal government primarily in Lower Manhattan, a broadening of attention to Downtown Brooklyn's outmoded offices is essential.

**Unsupportive City Policy**

The city government has not demonstrated that it recognizes the economic importance and potential of Downtown Brooklyn. As part of the region's Central Business District—the foundation of the Tri-State Metropolitan Region's economy—and as a potential center for small businesses and telecommunications technology fed by the higher education institutions, Downtown Brooklyn offers a good economic development investment for the city to overcome the challenges noted.

**Adjacent Pockets of Poverty**

There is a stark contrast between the prosperity of much of Downtown Brooklyn and pockets of poverty in some public housing developments on the edge of Downtown. For example, in the northern part of Fort Greene, across Flatbush Avenue Extension from Downtown Brooklyn, is an area where over a third of the workforce is unemployed, half of the residents live below the poverty line, and the crime rate is high. Fort Greene as a whole is a growing center for the arts, with strong institutions—Brooklyn Hospital, Brooklyn Tech High School, Long Island University, Pratt, St. Joseph's College and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. It has a wide income range, including large numbers of high-income households and continuing renovation of historic homes by middle class families. But the community also has pockets of concentrated poverty that need to benefit from the area's revitalization. In particular, national studies have shown that concentrating poor families in compact areas makes it difficult for them to improve their standard of living.
Overview of Achievements and Opportunities

The accompanying maps and tables show the study area, provide some vital statistics and illustrate the extent of the tremendous investment and growth that has occurred in Downtown over the past decade or so. Few downtowns in America can claim this amount of investment and job creation and retention. The growth of Brooklyn is a sign of optimism for the entire country, a direction marker to the future.

Downtown Brooklyn provides outstanding opportunities for increased investment. Not only is there existing building stock that can accept new tenants, but there are sites right in and on the edge of Downtown that offer wonderful opportunities for new development. Such opportunities are shown on Figures 4 and 5.

Downtown Brooklyn Facts

- The third largest business district in the New York City after Lower and Midtown Manhattan
- Over 90,000 private sector jobs
- Over 50,000 office jobs
- 48,000 office visitors
- 32,000 students in higher education institutions; 3,000 faculty and staff
- 3,000 jobs in courts
- 3,000 visitors to the courts daily
- 450 retail stores
- 164 restaurants
- 25 banks

- 100,000 daily visitors to Fulton Mall
- 120,500 use the subway daily
- 90,000 visitors to Brooklyn Academy of Music annually
- Total population coming to Downtown Brooklyn daily: 250,000
  4,400 daily commuters by foot
  40,000 by bus
  67,300 by car
  17,000 by Long Island Railroad
  120,500 by subway

- The Borough of Brooklyn, with a population of 2.3 million people, would be the fourth largest city in the United States.
Significant sites and Institutions

1. River Cafe/Bargemusic
2. Watchtower Society
3. NYS Department of Labor
4. NYC Human Resources Administration
5. The Promenade
6. Brooklyn Business Library
7. One Pierrepont Plaza
8. NYC Technical College
9. State Supreme Court
10. MetroTech Center
11. St. Francis College
12. Borough Hall
13. Municipal Building
14. Brooklyn Law School
15. NYC Board of Education
16. Long Island University
17. The Gallery at MetroTech
18. NYC Transit Museum
19. Long Island College Hospital
20. NYC Transit Authority
21. Macy's
22. Brooklyn Hospital Center
23. Federal Courthouse
24. Brooklyn Center
25. Brooklyn Academy of Music
26. Williamsburg Savings Bank
27. Atlantic Center
28. Brooklyn Museum/Botanic Garden/
   Brooklyn Public Library-Main Branch
Recent Achievements

1. **Brooklyn Academy of Music arts district**: BAM Majestic, the renovation of the 900-seat theater, completed in 1987, and the Strand Theater's renovation as Urban Glass Workshop and Brooklyn Community Access Television (BCAT), a project of the Fund for the Borough of Brooklyn.

2. **Pierrepont Plaza**, a 19-story office tower, completed in 1989. The primary tenant is Morgan Stanley & Company (1,000 employees). Other tenants include Goldman Sachs & Company, Chase Manhattan Bank and the Royal Bank of Canada.

3. **MetroTech Center**, a $1 billion corporate and academic complex on a 16-acre site that includes eight new and three renovated buildings and contains over 15,000 employees. It is built around a 3.5 acre landscaped commons. Current MetroTech occupants are:
   
   A. **The Securities Industry Automation Corporation** (SIAC) (1,200 employees), owned by the New York and American Stock Exchanges, processes all exchange transactions, accommodating up to 5 million daily. The 12-story, 322,000 square foot SIAC building was the first MetroTech building occupied, in 1990.

   B. **Brooklyn Union** (1,200 employees)/Bear Stearns (750 employees), a 23-story, 988,000 square foot building, 1992.

   C. **Chase Financial Services Corporation** (6,000 employees), occupies two buildings. A 1.4-million square foot 25-story building and a 453,000 square foot 10-story building, occupied in 1992.

   D. **Polytechnic University's DeBner Library/Center for Advanced Technology in Telecommunications**, a state-of-the-art $40 million, 4-story, 150,000 square foot library.

   E. **Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Center**, 10 MetroTech, completed in 1989.

   F. **New York City Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications **and **New York City Police Department Public Safety Answering Center** (E-911), (1,500 employees), 300,000 square feet.

   G. **The Minority Business Innovation Center at MetroTech** (MBIC), a 9,000 square foot facility at 14 MetroTech; the first small business incubator expressly slated for use by women- and minority-owned businesses in high technology and related fields.

   H. **(Planned) New Headquarters for the New York City Fire Department and Emergency Medical Service**.

4. **The Atlantic Avenue Lighting Project** (initiated in 1989) has placed over 100 period lamps to light the way for pedestrians to enhance evening shopping and dining on the Avenue.

5. **Downtown Brooklyn Streetscape Study**, new signs point the way to local places of interest to enhance Downtown's identity. The effort uses streetscaping improvements to link the Downtown sub-areas and improve pedestrian amenities. It will be implemented over time by public and private actions.

6. **The NYC Department of Transportation Flatbush Avenue Reconstruction Project** with its streetscape component.

7. **The Civic Center Park Project** has completed the renovation of the fountain and park adjacent to Borough Hall and the renovation of the parks adjacent to the State Supreme Court and the Post Office building.

8. **The Comprehensive Restoration of the Historic Brooklyn Borough Hall**.

9. **The Gallery at MetroTech** (formerly the Albee Square Mall) was renovated by Forest City Ratner Companies and reopened in 1993 with Toys R Us as an anchor store.

10. **Livingston Plaza**, a 12-story, 500,000-square-foot office building completed in 1991 is the new headquarters addition of the NYC Transit Authority (1,500 employees).


12. **90 Sands Street**, a 30 story, 500-room hotel, being built by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, better known as the Jehovah's Witnesses, for visitors to the church's Downtown Brooklyn headquarters, 1994.

13. **Atlantic Center**, a $200 million project. Construction has begun to build 378 attached homes for families earning up to $53,000 a year, 800,000 square feet of retail space, and 1,200 parking spaces. Caldor's and PathMark will be the anchor stores. Office development at that location is planned for a future date.

14. **The Brooklyn Botanic Garden**, Steinhardt Conservatory completed - $25 million; Palm House renovated as a special events center; Education building completed; Research Center opened; Administrative Building renovated.

15. **Brooklyn Museum**, West Wing opened after an international master planning competition.

Proposed Projects

1. 12 MetroTech Center (330 Jay Street), proposed as a 950,000 square foot, 32-story office building with approximately 14,000 square feet of retail space on the ground floor and a 320 space public parking garage on three below-grade levels. Potential tenants are being sought.

2. Renaissance Plaza, a $230 million, 31-story hotel and office tower is in construction. A Marriott hotel will occupy the first seven floors. The remaining 24 floors will be office space.

3. The State of New York and the Federal government are looking for sites for court facilities in Downtown Brooklyn. The challenge is for new courts to generate sustained activity to other sectors of the economy and encourage use of mass transit by employees and visitors as alternatives to an already congested road network.

4. Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) is considering the development of a multi-screen movie theater.

The State’s Court Program in Downtown Brooklyn calls for development of 584,000 square feet of space for criminal courts and 460,000 square feet for family courts and agencies. The Federal Court Projects slated for Downtown Brooklyn include the demolition of the existing federal office building, the construction of a 750,000 square foot courthouse with underground parking, and the modernization of the existing courthouse. As part of the project, the landmarked Brooklyn General Post Office would be renovated for reuse as a court-related facility, with a partial infill in its courtyard.

Key Sites

A. The Brooklyn Center site, which in 1986 was to be phase two of the Atlantic Center project, has been largely untouched, with limited demolition tied to Brooklyn Academy of Music’s parking needs. Because large amounts of frontage will eventually be redeveloped as the Brooklyn Center Urban Renewal Area along Flatbush Avenue, there has been little incentive to invest in short-term improvements.

B. Court Street between Schermerhorn and State (56-64 Court Street) has sat vacant for the past 10 years and cast a blight on this stretch of what could be a lively retail strip. The 17,000 square foot five building site includes a former theater. Proposals are presently being studied to develop the site as a mixed use movie theater/office complex or as a hotel.

C. Along Court Street and Livingston Street, in the heart of Downtown Brooklyn, some of the venerable buildings have a high vacancy rate, coupled with asbestos and antiquated building systems. The challenges here are similar to those faced by Lower Manhattan.

D. The parking lots along Schermerhorn Street have remained vacant for more than a decade, creating a blighting influence on the surrounding area. Subway lines pass directly under the string of large sites, adding to the complexity of any eventual construction.

E. Parking lots and under-utilized sites between Willoughby Street and Fulton Mall are in the seam between two active centers of commerce and retail.

F. The strategically placed mixed-use residential/warehouse district adjacent to major regional transportation systems and the Brooklyn Navy Yard industrial park is presently underutilized and could offer large spaces for industry or even spaces to live and work.

G. As a hub of regional and New York City rail lines, the Atlantic Avenue Terminal of the LIRR is one of the primary gateways to Downtown’s commuters, Fort Greene residents and Brooklyn Academy of Music patrons. But the station’s street presence, entrances and overall dinginess convey a message of neglect and blight which belies the reality of a neighborhood which has undergone profound improvement in recent years.

H. The St. George Hotel, the 110-year-old Brooklyn landmark that was once a glamorous 2,800 room hotel with the city’s largest indoor swimming pool, is recovering from a prolonged period of decline. Plans to provide housing for students are being considered.

I. The waterfront on the edge of Downtown is Brooklyn’s birthplace and its “front door” to the world. The potential for the development of a waterfront park with appropriate public uses on this large site is extraordinary.
Figure 5: Downtown and Greater Brooklyn: Proposed Projects and Key Undeveloped Sites
Physical Character

Figure 6: Physical Character
Review of Critical Conditions

Completing the revitalization which began during the 1980s will require that all of Downtown Brooklyn’s stakeholders—government, business, neighborhood leaders and institutions—join together in a coordinated effort to address the challenges facing Downtown Brooklyn.

This section of the report elaborates on the elements of Downtown Brooklyn that give it strength and those that must be addressed to enable the area to capture its share of the growth and prosperity in the metropolitan region. Investments will be required to meet these challenges during the next decade—a decade during which the economy will grow only modestly. By understanding the aspects of Downtown Brooklyn that limit its appeal as a place to invest, work, shop and visit, we can identify what needs to be done to enhance its attractiveness and to build upon its strengths for the future.

In addition to an extensive public outreach effort, numerous meetings of a “working group” comprised of representatives of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Brooklyn Development Association, the Borough President’s office and key business leaders have guided the planning process and helped to frame the project’s findings.

Economic and Demographic Projections

Economic and demographic projections are predictions of what will happen if present policies and trends continue. They are not necessarily recommendations, and they might be changed by changing policies. The best available jobs and population projections are in tables 3.10 to 3.13. They were prepared by regional economist Regina B. Armstrong for several organizations such as RPA and the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) whose work requires an analysis of future jobs and population.

RPA estimates that the Tri-State Metropolitan Region’s economic growth over the next decade will be slow, as the region struggles to recover employment lost between 1989 and 1993. In that period, nearly 800,000 jobs were eliminated in the region, as a global and national recession, corporate downsizing, defense reductions and structural weaknesses converged to stifle the region’s economy in a particularly severe manner. RPA projects that New York City will not recover these losses until 2008. In the slow growth decade ahead, the region must invest in its physical and human infrastructure in order to have a strong, growing economy in later decades.

Over the past decade, new, powerful corporate entities have joined the Downtown Brooklyn community, reversing a decline in large, private sector investment in the area since the 1970s. The MetroTech Center development has propelled the Downtown Brooklyn business community into a competitive position as an integral part of the regional Central Business District. MetroTech Center provides a unique urban office and academic park linking research and training to business needs in the market-place. A number of these “technopoles” exist around the world, generally developed in suburban or rural settings. The legacy of MetroTech Center will indicate whether Brooklyn will be truly enriched by MetroTech and vice-versa, or whether the complex will be viewed in the long-term as an isolated super-block development. When the leases for key MetroTech firms end, what will keep these firms firmly committed to Downtown Brooklyn?

The NYMTC preliminary economic forecasts show growth in a number of regional economic sectors, which are listed and quantified for Downtown Brooklyn by the New York State Department of Labor and described below. These include telecommunications infrastructure, financial services, advanced corporate services, science-based manufacturing, global workforce, retail trade, not-for-profit institutions, government and import-export activities.

Other factors include:

- Corporate entities which have deep roots in Downtown Brooklyn and the surrounding communities can be counted on for long-range commitments to the area. Firms such as Brooklyn Union and NYNEX have invested heavily in the future of Downtown Brooklyn. The infrastructure improvements they have provided will help Downtown Brooklyn compete more effectively in global information-based industries.

- MetroTech Center attracted the financial services industry not only due to its proximity to Wall Street, but also because financial firms rely heavily on computers and telecommunications, in which Polytechnic
University faculty are expert. According to preliminary NYMTC economic forecasts, the financial services industry is expected to grow. Polytechnic faculty and students are already performing cooperative research on systems networking and similar subjects.

- Brooklyn's traditional strength—its small business community—is flexible and could readily adapt to changing conditions and technologies. If relationships could be strengthened between large and small members of Downtown's business community, entrepreneurs specializing in manufacturing technology might serve as a useful ecking ground for larger producers to meet evolving demand. PolyVentures, a recently created Downtown Brooklyn venture capital enterprise, is looking for technology-based ideas that can become profitable enterprises. The small business community of high-quality manufacturing and specialized services is expected to remain strong in Brooklyn.

- Downtown Brooklyn's higher education institutions (described on page 31) are attended in large part by working students who represent a potential labor pool available to Downtown Brooklyn employers. Many of these well-trained graduates are Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, African-Americans and recent immigrants. This diversity offers Brooklyn firms an opportunity to take a lead in multi-cultural workforce development. As a nexus of industries connected to area schools, Downtown Brooklyn's education-work connection will be important for future competitiveness.

- New York City is the global capital of financial services. As it has always been, Brooklyn is still a major destination for newly arrived immigrants (nearly 500,000 since 1980, according to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services). The immigrant population offers an opportunity to create new products for emerging foreign markets. Russia and China are two possible markets that might be well served by first- and second-generation graduates of Brooklyn schools working in Downtown businesses.

- Downtown Brooklyn has a profitable retail sector, with opportunities for expansion to meet untapped demand. Retail data issued by the NYC Department of City Planning and Forest City Ratner Companies suggest that Brooklyn residents and people working there do a great deal of shopping outside the borough because of insufficient shopping opportunities in the borough. NYMTC projects that retail employment will grow.

- Current reductions in state and city government employment will limit job opportunities in the near term, but government employment is projected to grow modestly after 2010.

- Downtown Brooklyn could become appropriate for import-export businesses, particularly for goods that move by truck, rail and water-borne carriers, because of major regional roadways, a possible rail freight connection to New Jersey, proximity to the waterfront and adjacent warehouse space, and Downtown Brooklyn's commercial core.

*Transportation, Communications and Public Utilities **Finance, Insurance and Real Estate
Office Space

Commercial

Since 1987, more than three million square feet of new office space has been built and occupied in Downtown Brooklyn, nearly all of it leased. A typical 10-year lease in a new Downtown Brooklyn building with modern systems has a current rental rate between $22 and $26 per square foot. Concessions have included 6-12 months of free rent and a cash contribution for tenant improvements. In addition, there have been a number of New York City incentives for qualifying companies that further reduce the effective rent. By comparison, the office rents charged in a number of Court Street’s older buildings range between $16-$20 per square foot. In Lower Manhattan, rents range from $25-$35 per square foot for the newer buildings and $15-$20 per square foot for the older buildings.

The recent recession has left the Tri-State Metropolitan Region with 50-100 million square feet of empty office space competing for tenants. Within the region’s Central Business District, the Downtown Brooklyn real estate picture is different from Lower Manhattan’s. In older Downtown Brooklyn buildings, a multiplicity of tenants is the rule; no building is largely vacant or subject to the effects of a single corporate departure. Lower Manhattan, by contrast, has many virtually vacant buildings and many controlled by their lenders. Due to lender-controlled below market deals, some Lower Manhattan offerings are as low as $10-$12 per square foot, posing a serious competitive threat to older Downtown Brooklyn buildings. It should be noted, however, that the city’s proposed Lower Manhattan Initiative incentive package is not available to relocations from Downtown Brooklyn.

In Downtown Brooklyn, while new, large-scale developments at MetroTech Center and Pierrepont Plaza are major successes, anticipated spin-off tenancies have yet to materialize. By and large, other office users did not follow the MetroTech anchors to existing Downtown Brooklyn buildings. MetroTech and Pierrepont Plaza can offer new space and rents comparable to older buildings. This rent benefits from real estate tax abatements, capital

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*SIC=Standard Industry Classification
Source: New York State Department of Labor and RPA, 1993
assistance and energy programs that are not available in older buildings. So it is understandable that some of the older buildings are less in demand and pose a number of challenges. Their rents have been stable or declining in the past few years. The current level is necessary to cover taxes, maintenance and operation, debt, and major repairs. Although some buildings have had substantial reinvestment in major systems, other buildings which were more highly leveraged suffer from deferred maintenance. They have antiquated systems that are inadequate for state-of-the-art computer installations, poor floor layouts for modern office uses, and some of them are poorly maintained.

With declining occupancy rates and an uncertain future, funds for reinvestment will be more difficult. Buildings without some reinvestment will become increasingly noncompetitive. A number of these buildings, some of which have exterior architectural merit, are located along Court Street, Livingston Street and Joralemon Street, where overall vacancy rates are greater than 15%, with some buildings higher, according to various real estate sources. On the positive side, Independence Savings Bank upgraded the former Brooklyn Union Gas building on Montague Street and 186 Remsen Street is 100% occupied. In addition, Federated Department Stores, Inc. has plans to reoccupy the former A&S offices which contained 900 employees linked to the store on Fulton Mall.

Public Sector

Columbus Park and Cadman Plaza were created in the 1950s as part of an urban renewal project that involved clearing several blocks of Downtown Brooklyn to make way for the Civic Center, Borough Hall, the seat of Brooklyn government, the State Supreme Court, the Federal Building and Court House and the Brooklyn Municipal Building generate enormous activity for Downtown, spinning off supporting services to the Court Street law offices and restaurants.

The public sector has contributed to Downtown’s resurgence since the 1970s. The State of New York relocated staff from the World Trade Center to one million square feet in Downtown Brooklyn. The State renovated space for the Worker’s Compensation Board, the State Labor Department, and the State Department of Taxation. This translates to roughly 5,000 employees. In addition, the City of New York relocated agency headquarters to renovated buildings including the Fire Department, the Department of Finance and the Agency for Child Development. These relocations satisfied agency needs for modern space at reasonable rents while demonstrating that agency headquarters could succeed in Downtown Brooklyn. These relocations increased the Downtown employment base, generated reinvestment in older buildings and brought increased activity to the area. By 1989, Court Street’s occupancy rate was at 90%, according to real estate sources.

The public sector has continued to be a prime tenant in Downtown’s real estate market with the recent completion of Livingston Plaza, the new headquarters of the NYC Transit Authority, and in MetroTech Center, the NYC Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications, the NYC Police Department Public
Safety Building and the Internal Revenue Service Center. The Fire Department and the Emergency Medical Service are expected to move into a new building in MetroTech Center in the near future.

Unfortunately, some public sector tenants in older buildings are considering leaving their old quarters for various reasons: consolidation and efficiency, cutbacks and the availability of newer Downtown Brooklyn buildings. The Brooklyn District Attorney's office in the Brooklyn Municipal Building, for example, will be the prime office tenant for the Renaissance Plaza hotel-office complex. The Federal Building and Courthouse complex will expand so as to unify its dispersed offices into one facility.

New York State recently announced that it is considering consolidating many of its offices throughout the five boroughs in one location in Lower Manhattan. Also under consideration by New York State is a plan to move the 800-person Worker's Compensation Board at 180 Livingston Street to an upstate site. This proposed relocation would have a secondary effect on area lawyers specializing in this practice. The Youth Board, which occupies 40% of its building on Court Street, may consolidate its position in Manhattan. Elsewhere in Downtown, a non-profit agency will return two floors of its space due to defunding of its foster care services. Other child care agencies are similarly affected by changed City budgets. Home attendant placement agencies that have been growing may face cutbacks with proposed Medicare and Medicaid program changes. Finally, the 250,000-square-foot Howard Clothes Building, at the Manhattan Bridge, is vacant and the 250,000-square-foot State Labor Department Building at Fulton Landing may soon be vacant, although these two are not centrally located.

Client service agencies and programs with high visitor traffic such as probation, parole and clinics are generally looking for space, but they are largely incompatible with first-class, multi-tenant professional operations. These are better situated at free-standing locations where the program can be responsible for the building traffic and strained elevators. More desperate landlords of multi-tenant buildings may resort to these uses to fill vacant space.
Retail

Fulton Mall is the most active and profitable retail district in Downtown Brooklyn. This eight-block limited-access street was the first attempt at a major pedestrian mall in New York City and has been closed to all traffic except for buses and delivery vehicles since its opening in 1984. Downtown Brooklyn has other important retail areas: Willoughby Street, between MetroTech Center and the Fulton Mall; and the side streets that link Willoughby to the Fulton Mall; Court Street bordering Brooklyn Heights, with stores on the ground floor of office buildings; Montague Street, in Brooklyn Heights; Livingston Street, amid public agency office buildings; Atlantic Avenue, famous for antiques and Middle-Eastern food shops and restaurants; Flatbush Avenue, west of Fulton Mall, between Atlantic Center and Tillary Street; Jay Street; DeKalb Avenue; Fulton Street, east of Flatbush; and MetroTech Center, with stores and restaurants on the ground floor of some of the buildings.

Fulton Mall is an extremely profitable retail street for both merchants and landlords. According to the A&S/Rothenberg Survey and the Department of City Planning, Fulton Mall contains 200 of the 450 stores in Downtown Brooklyn. According to Crane's New York Business, the Mall's vacancy rate is stable at only 3%. Among the stores are several national chains including Duane Reade, Woolworth's, Strawberry, Modell's, Thom McCan's and the Wiz, which recently doubled its floor-space. Toys R Us, located in the Gallery at MetroTech, is adjacent to the Fulton Mall. Macy's has replaced A&S as the Fulton Mall anchor store. According to the Fulton Mall Improvement Association, the average annual sales for the 8-block shopping area is in excess of $450 million, with some individual stores grossing over $600 per square foot. According to a local paper, rents on Fulton Mall are currently $90-$100 per square foot. Retail experts claim that the figure is closer to $120 per square foot, well above the $40-$60 per square foot that major chain stores typically pay. To a great degree, profits by the small retailer are made by exploiting the high foot traffic on the mall for a high volume of sales. A major source of this bustle of activity during all hours of the day are the five Fulton Street bus routes in each direction, unloading passengers onto the sidewalks of the mall from points all
over Brooklyn. The Fulton Mall Improvement Association estimates that over 100,000 people visit the 8-block stretch of stores every day.

As a successful moderate- and discount-priced shopping district, Downtown Brooklyn attracts working-class, low-income communities from throughout the borough. There are several reasons for this: 1) Downtown’s convenience to borough-wide bus and subway service; 2) a critical mass of discount stores offers a wide range of merchandise; and 3) many of these customers are from communities under-served in the general merchandise, apparel, furniture and appliances carried by Downtown stores, especially along Fulton Mall.

However, many sectors of the Downtown Brooklyn community have expressed hope that this base of discount stores can be augmented by more name-brand stores featuring high quality merchandise in more attractive, service-oriented surroundings.

Fulton Mall is strategically placed to serve the Downtown Brooklyn workforce. Eighty percent of the more than 90,000 Downtown employees fall within a nine-minute walk, considered a typical lunchtime trip from desk to destination. Retail consultant David Milder claims that $2,658 a year in expenditures can be expected from each Downtown employee in a normal retail environment. That suggests a potential expenditure in Downtown Brooklyn of over $200 million a year, from office workers only. The 3,000 daily visitors to the courts, the 32,000 high school and college students, and the 106,000 residents in neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown represent additional demand. A significant portion of this potential consumer population remains untapped because of the current selection of stores.

Recognizing this potential, national retail chains have been studying ways to strengthen their presence in or around Downtown Brooklyn. And one important development is already moving forward: Atlantic Center on Flatbush Avenue. This projected development of 800,000 square feet of retail space is attracting large-scale retailers such as Caldor’s and PathMark and offers new potential for progress for all of Downtown Brooklyn.

Discussions with residents of adjacent brownstone communities indicate that many of them do not shop on or near Fulton Mall. The Atlantic Center location is well-positioned to attract customers from Park Slope, Prospect Heights, Boerum Hill, Fort Greene and Clinton Hill. According to studies by Forest City Ratner Companies, the developer of Atlantic Center, only 15% of Fulton Mall shoppers make over $50,000 per year, compared to 29% in the Atlantic Center trade area.

Yet, according to the Fulton Mall Improvement Association, of the 270,880 adults in the seven zip codes surrounding Fulton Mall, 147,000 of them live in households with an annual income of $25,000 or more, and 65,103 adults live in households with an annual income of $50,000 or more. So while the client “catchment” areas for Fulton Mall and Atlantic Center are roughly the same, Fulton Mall is not getting its share of potential middle-to-upper-middle-income shoppers.

Unlike Fulton Mall, which attracts shoppers from across the borough, Downtown Brooklyn’s other retail areas primarily serve residents and workers in the immediate vicinity, though some of Montague Street’s restaurants and shops attract employees from MetroTech Center, more than a nine-minute walk away. Montague Street retail activity also supports the affluent community of
Brooklyn Heights, whose median household income is $60,504.

Retail on Court Street (north of Atlantic Avenue) and Livingston Street depends on the office buildings they serve. Many of the offices on Court Street are occupied by lawyers and municipal employees. The Court Street retail vacancy rate is 4%-8% according to *Crain's New York Business*. (This figure also includes an entire block of vacant buildings.) Office space vacancies in the Court Street buildings weaken sales along that street.

Livingston Street stores could suffer when the Fire Department moves and the Board of Education continues to downsize. Willoughby Street is a major east-west axis through Downtown, a path for many subway-bound MetroTech employees. The future of this strategically-placed street along the flanks of MetroTech Center is of great interest to the Downtown Brooklyn community, since it is a seam between the new offices and the rest of Downtown. A major streetscaping effort will soon be underway along Willoughby Street to improve signage, trees and street furniture.

The establishment of the MetroTech Business Improvement District in 1992 has already had tremendous impact on the quality of life along Willoughby Street, and its influence is gradually extending to the streets leading to Fulton Mall. The MetroTech BID and the Fulton Mall Improvement Association have joined forces on a number of ventures—from security cooperation to the design of a retail map—signaling a growing cooperation between the two areas. And the Fulton Mall Improvement Association has undertaken an ambitious effort to enforce retailing standards through a multi-agency initiative, working with the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs, the NYC Police Department, the NYC Department of Transportation, the NYC Buildings Department and the New York State Department of Finance. Recognizing these successes, a number of Court Street and Montague Street merchants and landowners have been trying (without success) to establish new business improvement districts.

Downtown Brooklyn's retailing weakness is primarily the failure to fully exploit its strengths, i.e. to serve all the potential retail customers. Office workers and others in the Downtown area are frustrated at not being able to find the stores and services they want. This diminishes their satisfaction with Downtown as a whole. According to many people interviewed on this subject, Fulton Mall is seen as a distinct district, where a feeling of insecurity and perception of physical decay limits the desire to shop there. In a 1994 survey of Fort Greene resident shoppers conducted by the Fort Greene Association, 61% of the respondents felt that the lack of shopping opportunities in and around their neighborhood was the most serious issue. While some find that the rough and tumble appearance of Fulton Mall reflects an exciting urban vitality, many interviewed object to the general appearance of the Mall and claim that it gives the impression that merchandise is cheap rather than just inexpensive.

It is difficult to overcome the perceptions that seem to keep some shoppers away from Fulton Mall. The current operation is profitable, attracting large numbers of bargain-hunting customers, and there is no way to guarantee
that a different merchandising approach will, in fact, attract new customers. Furthermore, MetroTech firms installed company cafeterias and ground-floor delis to serve office workers. While it has become common practice for corporations to offer employees on-site cafeterias, taking a large proportion of MetroTech Center employees off the shopping streets of Downtown during lunch hour reduces the support for the kinds of retailing they might want outside the complex.

Moderate-priced restaurants are the staple of office-worker purchases, and Downtown Brooklyn's paucity of evening activities puts the whole burden of restaurant profitability on breakfasts and lunches. This makes it difficult for entrepreneurs to compete with company cafeterias except in areas where adjacent neighborhoods provide customers who might come to dinner at night, e.g., Atlantic Avenue and Montague Street.

Still, it is worth repeating that current Downtown Brooklyn office workers alone could generate upwards of $200 million in retail trade per year, according to typical spending of office workers in similar downtowns, if efforts were made to appeal to them. Improving appearance and merchandising to attract office workers would create conditions attractive to nearby residents as well.

The concern over crime on Fulton Mall and its surrounding area continues to undermine Downtown's quality of life and dampen its retail potential. A Long Island University survey of 50 shoppers on Fulton Mall, (primarily African-American women) showed that 40% of them were concerned for their safety. This figure was compared to a survey of the same number of shoppers in Queens Mall where only 4% had similar concerns. Security concerns extend to the integrity of retail practices as well. According to the Fulton Mall Improvement Association Security Report (1994-95), $600,000 worth of counterfeit merchandise was confiscated by law enforcement officials during the year.

Downtown's fragmented retail sector means that Downtown Brooklyn is comprised of numerous retail strips, and not one or two retail districts. On Fulton Mall, the high foot traffic volume has had limited spill-over to the side retail streets, particularly Gold, Duffield, Elm and Hoyt, whose contrasting lack of activity lends a neglected, intimidating feel. At the south end of
Downtown, Court Street changes character as it crosses busy Atlantic Avenue, from a single-purpose daytime retail and restaurant district to the north to a multifaceted neighborhood shopping district to the south. Both sections of Court Street serve residential neighborhoods, but the northern portion's retail continuity and vitality is undermined by a block of vacant buildings and a block-long parking structure. This may improve with the proposed development of a multiplex movie theater or hotel between Schermerhorn and State Streets. Finally, while Atlantic Avenue merchants have made great strides in improving the area's retail character, the Court Street parking structure, the wide Boerum Place (and service station) and the large Brooklyn House of Detention have split Atlantic Avenue's retail area into two weaker sections. Nevertheless, the Atlantic Avenue/Court Street area is continuing to develop into an evening draw for the neighborhood.

Increasing retail sales is related to another goal of many Downtown Brooklyn workers and residents—more nightlife. Evening shopping almost certainly depends on appealing to nearby residents and area students, which would require targeting appearance and merchandising to them and enhancing public safety, including convenient, safe parking. Nightlife can most easily be stimulated by good restaurants, and restaurants can prosper if they can offer lunches as well as dinners, from bargain-priced lunches to attract office workers to high quality business lunch venues. Junior's Restaurant on Flatbush Avenue attracts evening diners from the periphery of Downtown Brooklyn and office workers at lunch and breakfast. On Fulton Mall, the landmarked restaurant Gage and Tollner reopened in 1996, offering high quality business lunches and dinners. On DeKalb Avenue, several fine restaurants have recently opened, and the nearby Brooklyn Academy of Music is planning to develop a year-round cafe/restaurant to continue the revitalization of its neighborhood and address a grievance of many of its patrons over the lack of adjacent dining choices. Montague Street, Court Street and the Fulton Ferry Landing all offer high quality restaurants, yet most of them are not in the actual downtown area.

How can Downtown take advantage of its increased market to complement—not replace—existing retail offerings? Can merchandise and merchandising quality be improved for existing shoppers? Is there potential to reuse more of the larger department store-sized buildings along Fulton Mall for “medium-box” stores like those on Sixth Avenue in Manhattan?

Atlantic Center's projected 800,000 square feet of new retailing could reduce Fulton Mall sales, although it may end up serving mostly shoppers who do not now shop on Fulton Mall. Atlantic Center retailing could, in fact, increase Fulton Mall sales by demonstrating to competing owners and merchants how to diversify their merchandise and make their environment more attractive.
Surrounding Neighborhoods

Residential areas adjacent to or near Downtown Brooklyn include Brooklyn Heights, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Prospect Heights, Boerum Hill, Cobble Hill, Vinegar Hill and Bridge Plaza. Downtown and much of the surrounding area are within Community District 2 (Fort Greene, Brooklyn Heights, Fulton Landing, parts of Boerum Hill and the Navy Yard). Cobble Hill, to the south, is in Community District 6.

A small fraction (4%) of the Greater Downtown’s population resides within Downtown proper (Census Tracts: 9, 11, 13, 27, 37), totaling 4,406 people in 2,496 households. According to the Demographic Profile of Community District 2, a population of 94,534 people reside in the district and comprise a total of 39,494 households. The total population of the Greater Downtown area after adding Cobble Hill is 105,792 people living in 43,592 households. The area also has a youthful population. In Fort Greene, for example, the 19 and under age group represents a large percentage (30%) of the neighborhood’s entire population.

Over the past 15 years, a number of the neighborhoods surrounding Downtown Brooklyn have undergone considerable change, as new middle class families moved in, attracted by the housing stock, gardens and neighborhood feel. While Brooklyn Heights has always maintained its affluent population, neighboring Cobble Hill, Boerum Hill, Fort Greene, Prospect Heights, Clinton Hill and Park Slope gradually saw a rise in household income during this period. In Cobble Hill’s census tract 49, for example, the per capita income has increased 93% over the past 10 years, and in Fort Greene’s census tract 181, it has increased 78% (adjusted for inflation).

Despite the continuing efforts made by the public and private sectors in job placement services and links with area schools, a key challenge remains to provide opportunities for certain portions of the Fort Greene community just east of Downtown Brooklyn. Although the emerging economy places increased value in training and
education, roughly 40% of adults in Fort Greene zip code 11205 have not attained a high school diploma, according to a Brooklyn Hospital study. Of the Fort Greene population living below the poverty line, 37% are under 17 years old. Education and training problems in sections of this neighborhood are compounded by decades-old disinvestment and abandonment by businesses and industries which formerly provided basic services, jobs and stability. Across the street from MetroTech Center, Fort Greene's Myrtle Avenue retail area is struggling to maintain its level of service to the surrounding community in the face of crime and disinvestment.

The northeast portion of Downtown Brooklyn encompasses three New York City housing developments: Walt Whitman, Raymond Ingersoll and Farragut Houses, with additional low income row houses clustered nearby. The median household income in those projects is $11,344 per year, with 46% of the families living below the poverty line. These public housing developments demonstrate that pockets of poverty do exist around Downtown Brooklyn, pockets that do not mirror the diversity of other neighborhoods, including the rest of Fort Greene.

In many of these neighborhoods surrounding Downtown, historic homes have been renovated and a broader income mix has encouraged more stores and restaurants to open. Cafés, restaurants and jazz clubs along Fulton Street, DeKalb and Lafayette avenues in Fort Greene such as New City Cafe, Brooklyn Moon Cafe and Royston's Rhythms, and stores such as Spike Lee's, have attracted a diverse clientele which mirrors Fort Greene's strength as one of the most successful racially integrated neighborhoods in New York City. Court Street, Montague Street and Atlantic Avenue are neighborhood shopping streets with stores and restaurants that have the potential to benefit Downtown's students and workers nearby.

In the long term, Downtown Brooklyn's renewal is closely tied to the success of these surrounding neighborhoods. But, the neighborhoods do not benefit as much as they could from Downtown. Residents of Brooklyn Heights and Cobble Hill, for example, claim to be satisfied with their neighborhood stores and restaurants. They perceive little reason to walk into Downtown Brooklyn to shop or eat. The perceived lack of retail choices, the option of driving to large stores and modern shopping centers, and the easy subway access to Manhattan contribute to this separation. But Fort Greene may, in the near future, see an increase in commercial activity as entertainment choices expand around the Brooklyn Academy of Music and retail options develop at the new Atlantic Center complex.

Few nearby residents work Downtown. According to figures from the Department of City Planning, only 4,400 of the 50,000 persons working Downtown walk to work, although there are nearly 80,000 adults living within a 20-minute walk.

The availability of job opportunities in Downtown for area residents has been the source of concern in some of the neighborhoods surrounding Downtown where poverty and unemployment is high. It is important that a line not be drawn between the socioeconomic problems faced by neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown Brooklyn today and the development plans for Downtown Brooklyn tomorrow.

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<td>21.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Hill</td>
<td>Sunset Park</td>
<td>18,770</td>
<td>33.42</td>
<td>16.45</td>
<td>15.46</td>
<td>15.08</td>
<td>19.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford Stuy</td>
<td>26,595</td>
<td>41.57</td>
<td>18.63</td>
<td>13.97</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td>14.28</td>
<td>3,798</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average for shoppers on Fulton Mall's
The Gallery | NA | 22 | 26 | 17 | 20 | 15 | NA | $25,800 |

Source: Forest City Ratner Companies
Activities in Downtown Brooklyn have benefited residents of low-income Brooklyn neighborhoods by offering college scholarships, internships in businesses, career counseling and encouragement to high school students to study science and engineering. Downtown employees volunteer in social service and educational organizations to increase opportunities for young people, and corporations have contributed to public school programs. Examples include:

- Securities Industry Automation Corporation (SIAC) offers college orientation programs to 200 local high school students; employees volunteer in an early intervention program designed to help at risk students learn to read. SIAC also obtains computers for area schools, connects them to the internet and offers volunteer tutoring through e-mail.

- Chase has provided technical assistance and funding to the Fort Greene Strategic Neighborhood Action Partnership (SNAP), and is working on literacy programs in the Fort Greene neighborhood.

- The Brooklyn Botanic Garden developed Project Green Reach to foster interest and appreciation for science in elementary and junior high school students, and Brooklyn Greenbridge, a program that helps neighborhood groups and schools improve inner-city environments by teaching them gardening techniques.

- Consolidated Edison, Brooklyn Union, the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office, the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Academy of Music and a number of other Downtown Brooklyn organizations have similar programs to improve opportunities for area residents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>% White</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>% Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn Heights</td>
<td>22,941</td>
<td>11,788</td>
<td>82.69</td>
<td>10.28</td>
<td>7.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Slope</td>
<td>58,775</td>
<td>25,299</td>
<td>70.62</td>
<td>13.83</td>
<td>15.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospect Heights</td>
<td>70,239</td>
<td>25,610</td>
<td>10.66</td>
<td>83.55</td>
<td>5.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boerum Hill/Cobble Hill</td>
<td>49,912</td>
<td>21,570</td>
<td>68.36</td>
<td>16.59</td>
<td>15.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft. Greene/Clinton Hill</td>
<td>80,156</td>
<td>28,428</td>
<td>23.45</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>12.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Park</td>
<td>59,600</td>
<td>18,770</td>
<td>49.23</td>
<td>7.57</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford Stuyvesant</td>
<td>70,721</td>
<td>26,595</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>88.33</td>
<td>8.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Forest City Ratner Companies*
Safety

While there are thriving clusters of activity at night along Montague Street, Court Street and Atlantic Avenue, the isolation of these clusters and fear of crime in the Downtown Brooklyn area have hampered Downtown’s ability to fulfill its potential as a 24-hour center of activity. And yet, Downtown Brooklyn’s crime rate has dropped in recent years, partly due to the greater emphasis on community policing and crackdowns on “quality of life” infractions and truancy programs, according to the New York City Police Department. The 84th Precinct in Downtown Brooklyn uses robbery as a bellwether for crime trends: in 1989, there were 1,786 robberies in the 84th Precinct, whereas in 1994, there were only 1,001—a 40% decline. According to New York City Police Department crime data, Downtown Brooklyn’s crime rate compares favorably with that of Lower Manhattan.

The private sector has played a major role as well, organizing private security measures and spurring increased public sector initiatives. As part of an inducement to Chase Manhattan Bank’s Downtown Brooklyn relocation and as part of the Mayor’s Anti-Crime program, major commitments to increased law enforcement staffing have been made in Downtown Brooklyn. The MetroTech Center community, comprised of the MetroTech BID patrols and Chase Manhattan security patrols, has created a safer Willoughby Street/MetroTech area. Chase has even posted a guard at the entrance of the Atlantic Avenue Terminal, with Chase shuttle service down Flatbush Avenue to MetroTech. Overall, MetroTech BID security patrols have coordinated their efforts with the Fulton Mall Improvement Association patrols and the NYPD.

While well-patrolled Downtown areas are safe and are perceived as safe, in interviews Downtown employees and students cited a pervasive fear of walking through much of Downtown after dark. The visible security presence so prevalent near MetroTech Center does not extend uniformly throughout Downtown. Workers on Flatbush Avenue, for example, point to the secure environment in the MetroTech BID which does not include them. To allay such concerns, area businesses and institutions have adopted various strategies such as van pools or shuttle buses to carry workers or visitors directly to their destinations as an alternative to area subways or walking through the streets. Although this is an understandable short-term solution, in the long term this weakens overall security by taking pedestrian traffic off the streets. Brooklyn Academy of Music provides bus transportation from Manhattan to its performances, SIAC

![Figure 18: Felony Complaints in thousands](image)

![Figure 19: Brooklyn Poverty Status by Census Tract](image)
offers free van service to Manhattan's Path train stations for employees who live in New Jersey. Chase employees are offered free van service between Atlantic Terminal and MetroTech Center, and many MetroTech employees eat at their secure company cafeterias.

Figure 20: Declining Crime Rate for Downtown Brooklyn (84th Precinct)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1989</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>% Change 89-94</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Larceny (Auto)</td>
<td>1047</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>-55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>1786</td>
<td>1001</td>
<td>-78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felonious Assault</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>-30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Felonies</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>1832</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>-138%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Larceny</td>
<td>1698</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>-70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Misdemeanors</td>
<td>6238</td>
<td>4693</td>
<td>-33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints</td>
<td>13426</td>
<td>8940</td>
<td>-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Felonies</td>
<td>7188</td>
<td>4247</td>
<td>-69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 84th Precinct overlaps with Community District 2
Source: 84th Precinct, NYPD

Educational Institutions

A concentration of large public and private educational institutions located on the edges of Downtown Brooklyn's retail and commercial core includes Polytechnic University, New York City Technical College, Brooklyn Friends and Westinghouse High School in the center and to the north; Brooklyn Law School, St. Francis College, St. Anne's School and Packer Collegiate Institute to the west; and Long Island University (LIU) and Brooklyn Technical High School to the east. Further east are St. Joseph's College and Pratt Institute. Other high schools include St. Joseph's, Metropolitan Corporate Academy, Pacific High School, Sarah J. Hale and City as School.

The combined student population of Downtown Brooklyn's higher education institutions (colleges and universities) is around 32,000, with an additional 3,000 faculty and staff. Realizing this population's potential contribution to Downtown remains a key challenge. Two issues regarding these higher education institutions are particularly important to recognize: the degree to which they are already successfully working with businesses in Downtown Brooklyn and the region, and how these suc-
cesses might be expanded; and the potential to use these institutions to make major improvements in Downtown Brooklyn's nightlife, a goal that has been identified by various groups throughout this planning process.

These educational institutions have demonstrated their capacity to assist large and small businesses—providing training, education, research and consultation. They offer state-of-the-art expertise on computer use, manufacturing, health care, polymer and imaging research and management. And they have donated expertise and talent to Downtown establishments and to the borough. For example, Long Island University students are doing survey research for this project, Long Island University formed a Small Business Center to assist area businesses, Polytechnic provided a journey-to-work study for the MetroTech BID, and St. Joseph's provides child care teachers for Chase when they need substitutes. Polytechnic University played a pivotal role in the development of MetroTech Center. LIU offers a free dance performance series during lunchtime and late afternoons.

The most obvious benefit for a firm of being near the Downtown educational institutions is that classes are located there. A firm's employees can readily take courses or the colleges' students can work part-time. Close-to-Downtown location gives a firm priority access to hire the institutions' students—with a chance to test them via co-op programs and internships. Proximity is important to students; in a survey of Polytechnic students a few years ago, location was the second most frequent reason they gave for choosing to study at Polytechnic's Brooklyn campus. According to a student-run Long Island University survey, roughly one-half of Downtown Brooklyn college students work part-time, so nearby businesses can find highly qualified employees or interns. For example, Brooklyn Law School attracts students from 40 states and 10 foreign countries. While studying, some of these students work in Downtown Brooklyn for attorneys, the courts and the Transit Authority. Reciprocally, the proximity of these higher learning centers is a strong attraction for Downtown workers to attend a Downtown Brooklyn college or university.

There are NYNEX employees studying at Polytechnic, City Tech and LIU with the company's tuition assistance, and many Brooklyn Union employees study at Polytechnic. Many Wall Street employees also choose to study at Polytechnic because it is close. Because living costs are high in the Northeast, firms often find it difficult to recruit college graduates to come to this part of the country, but most Downtown Brooklyn students already live here and have ties to family and friends so they stay despite the high living costs. Many Brooklyn students have had little experience with people in the corporate world. Polytechnic's Career Services office provides acculturation—for example, helping students successfully adjust to Wall Street expectations. The Downtown Brooklyn Training and Employment Council offers an additional service to employers by pre-screening and training job candidates.

It seems possible, therefore, to sell the benefit of being in or near Downtown Brooklyn and close to the higher education institutions that have demonstrated their capacity for helping business.

Several faculty members said that small business in particular would benefit from their expertise. One said: "We have analytical facilities they can't afford." Another said that Polytechnic's Center for Advanced Telecommunications Technology (CATT) and Center for Applied Large-scale Computing (CALC) could set up a network so small firms can use advanced computer technology that they could not afford individually. Last year, Crain's New York Business described CATT's accomplishments: "Many businesses don't understand the impact a good telecom system can have on their bottom line. Decisions are often left up to office managers, who may not be abreast of new technology in this rapidly changing field." According to a survey of employers by the New York City Department of Employment, 49% of employees in service occupations and 33% in professional occupations lacked basic computer skills, which employers saw to be increasingly important. However, reaching and assisting small business requires a good deal of marketing. At a recent conference, a speaker observed that small manufacturers find it hard to keep up with global competition because they do not know about new technologies or their profit margin is so small that they do not dare try anything new. Further, they are often isolated and do not know where to seek advice or get capital.

A secondary contribution of the Downtown higher education institutions is the presence of students on the streets—especially at night—contributing to greater activity. Students are potential customers for restaurants and stores. And the colleges' proximity to each other offers opportunity to share dormitory and/or athletic space and allow students to take courses at another college. Polytechnic University has weighed the possibility of building joint dormitory space near its campus, and there have been talks concerning joint dormitory space. Housing expansion is being undertaken by Brooklyn Law School, which owns eight buildings in the Court Street area and Brooklyn Heights that presently house 100 stu-
udents and more than 30 faculty members, staff and visiting scholars. A Downtown campus center serving all the institutions, with well-lighted routes and increased dormitory space, would help Downtown Brooklyn make the most of this potential.

As with other Downtown Brooklyn strengths, the weaknesses of Downtown's educational institutions are simply their unfulfilled potential. With an estimated 32,000 college students, Downtown Brooklyn is a college town, but few prospective investors or employers know it. With some exceptions (notably New York City Technical College), there is less interaction between nearby employers and the colleges than might be expected. For example, an official at Long Island University acknowledged that many LIU faculty and students do not know anything about MetroTech, which is only a few blocks away. Students do not seem to use Downtown facilities much, according to interviews and observation. No formal organization matches university research interests with the needs of Downtown businesses or maintains continued cooperative activities among the higher education institutions.

Additionally, there is no place where students from the various colleges can meet informally, such as a student union. Without a pleasant meeting place, few students stay around in the evenings. In an LIU student survey, 70% of students claimed they would prefer to go to Manhattan for social life and recreation. There is no intercollege cooperation to assure safety in and around subway stations at night, although more than half of the students use subways. When students do remain Downtown in the evening, there are few opportunities for students of different schools to socialize together, although a number of students expressed a desire to do so. Brooklyn Law School students frequent night spots along Court Street or in Boerum Hill, while Long Island University has completed a large and elegant student center on Flatbush Avenue in the former Brooklyn Paramount. The LIU student center's food court, however, closes in the afternoon, and access to the bar is restricted to LIU students and faculty.

When LIU's student center did open its doors to the other area schools for a special fashion show, it was well-attended by students from Polytechnic University and New York City Technical College. The Polytechnic University student center in MetroTech Center commons is under construction.

Finally, many Downtown employees have long commutes home and, we are told, hesitate to stay around at night. But courses brought to their office complex and timed immediately after work might attract continuing education students who now choose to go home and attend college near their home.
Technology

Downtown Brooklyn's location should provide opportunities to develop new technology-based businesses, school-business partnerships and information bulletin boards for adjacent communities. Downtown Brooklyn is already wired with fiber optic cable and the new buildings in MetroTech Center are all "smart." Utilizing technology could help to narrow the gap between discrete sections of Downtown, providing greater access to events and opportunities. Brooklyn Community Access Television, a program of the Fund for the Borough of Brooklyn, is one such clearinghouse of information.

Downtown Brooklyn's educational, research and training programs can become a magnet for new businesses and economic development. MetroTech's success in sharing a campus with Polytechnic has demonstrated that there is benefit in face-to-face communication and, therefore, in physical proximity. That proximity has enabled many Polytechnic students to work part-time for MetroTech companies and for MetroTech Center employees to study at Polytechnic. It fosters joint research as well as stimulating informal relationships.

Polytechnic University, New York City Technical College (City Tech), Pratt Institute and Long Island University all have programs for assisting businesses in research, training, education and consultation. The directors of the programs are unanimous in wanting to extend their services to more businesses. They recognize that the principal obstacle to doing that is inadequate money to publicize what they can do.

Many businesses already benefit from services and programs offered by these institutions. The director of a corporate laboratory working with Polytechnic remarked: "University research is essential for business. We can't know as much as they do about what's going on; they come to our problems with a different perspective. They are part of a world-wide network. The top professors are smarter than our researchers; we have to be more generalists."

Other business spokespersons working with Downtown Brooklyn higher education institutions said that university research is far less expensive than having comparable research in-house. Universities can explore possibilities that would be too costly for a corporation.

Polytechnic's Center for Advanced Telecommunications Technology (CATT), Center for Applied Large-scale Computing (CALC), Polymer Institute and Imaging Institute have done research for more than a dozen of the world's largest corporations and for major government agencies.

At the same time, Downtown Brooklyn's higher education institutions need partnerships with business. Partnerships provide practical experience for students, often with state-of-the-art equipment and software that universities cannot afford. Pratt tries to involve as many students as possible in business partnership work because it is good experience and produces new innovations.

Throughout the world, urban centers competing with Brooklyn are organizing technical assistance services for business, often linked to higher education. City Tech, LIU, Pratt and Polytechnic have special capacities to provide technical assistance in four areas of great potential for Brooklyn:

1. COMPUTERS. LIU, City Tech and Polytechnic help small firms to adopt computer systems for large-scale sophisticated design and frontier applications, such as Polytechnic's CATT, CALC and Center for Technology & Financial Services and City Tech's Manufacturing Resource Center and Computer-Integrated Manufacturing (CIM). Pratt also offers computer-aided design work, and St. Francis has provided business forums on computer use.

2. MANUFACTURING. A Manufacturing Engineering program at Polytechnic has 65 students, each doing an eight-month full-time internship in a factory and preparing a thesis on one of the factory's problems. This program and City Tech's Manufacturing Resources Center and CIM programs, which facilitate fully computerized manufacturing, help some very small firms. LIU's Small Business Institute offers advice on computerization and other needs, while Pratt performs design work for major manufacturers.

3. HEALTH SERVICES. LIU's Pharmacy school carries out research with Hoffman-LaRoche. Individual faculty members also perform research for firms and some scientists come to LIU for graduate study. Most of the research relates to product development, dosage and dosage delivery systems. (See page 38.)

4. INFRASTRUCTURE. Polytechnic's Civil and Environmental Engineering Department has worked with New York City government agencies on waste recycling, water quality testing and hazardous waste, among many topics.

The programs offered by Downtown Brooklyn institutions are widely respected. CATT recently was renewed as one
of New York State’s 13 advanced technology centers and will continue to receive $1 million a year from New York State for a second decade. CALC has worked with SIAC, NYNEX and NASA and won a Smithsonian computer software award. Polytechnic’s new Center for Technology & Financial Services prepares students to be experts in either financial packages and strategies or to be “technology generalists,” knowing enough about capital markets and telecommunications and computers to mediate between those fields. The Imaging Institute is financed entirely by clients, and the Polymer Institute has more than 25 faculty members doing research, about half with experience in industry.

In regard to training, Polytechnic and City Tech tailor courses to individual firms. City Tech’s Business & Industry Training Center, with 70 staff members, provides courses for NYNEX, IBM, General Motors, Mt. Sinai Medical Center, AT&T, TIAA-CREF, Brooklyn Goes Global, New York City agencies and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, among others. Polytechnic’s Management Department currently provides courses for Estee Lauder, Long Island Lighting Company, TIAA-CREF and SIAC. LIU’s co-op education program puts 200 students into part-time jobs, many in Downtown Brooklyn.

Can higher education services attract business to locate in or near Downtown Brooklyn? Although both Polytechnic and City Tech bring training courses to business sites throughout the metropolitan area and new technology allows long distance communication, there are benefits to business being near the campuses in Downtown Brooklyn. Both faculty and business representatives note the advantage of face-to-face communication. One corporate scientist said it “helps to look a person in the eye. People come from worlds apart. Misunderstandings that don’t seem possible occur easily.”

A faculty member closely associated with the most advanced telecommunications observed: “All our high-tech communications can’t replace face-to-face communication and serendipity.” Other high-tech faculty people agreed. A study of incubator buildings for embryonic firms found that distances of more than an hour’s travel time to their higher education mentors “begin to erode the success of the linkage.” A study asking why Silicon Valley has surged ahead of Route 128 in high tech employment concluded that physical proximity of California firms increased interaction, built trust, and created professional networks.

All of these programs of research and education could benefit small businesses as well as large ones. They could be the basis for attracting to Downtown Brooklyn firms and New York City agencies which understand the role of advanced technology (particularly telecommunications and computer technology) in improving efficiency. Since technologies are progressing quickly, a continuing link to a research and teaching institution is necessary to take advantage of these advances.
Cultural Institutions

While Downtown Brooklyn today still serves many of the functions that it did a century ago, the reasons people come to Downtown have changed since the area was established as a commercial and government center. Downtown Brooklyn is no longer the place where businesses or people must locate. It is, for an ever-increasing portion of the population, a place in which people choose to be. National trends, such as the decline of manufacturing and the growth of the suburbs, raise questions such as: What makes Downtown Brooklyn a preferred destination? What makes it special, and therefore competitive?

As a factor in determining quality of life, the arts are recognized, not as a luxury, but as central to the identity, viability and desirability of urban areas. The arts are also a significant engine of economic activity. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey estimates that the arts earn close to $10 billion annually for its 17-county region.

The arts have played a key role in the redevelopment of Downtown Brooklyn because artists and major cultural institutions are either already there or within easy reach. The area is home to several cultural institutions of international acclaim. Reinforced by mass transit systems and pedestrian access, Downtown Brooklyn provides proximity to other artists, numerous possibilities for presentation, and access to diverse and large audiences.

The major cultural institutions—Brooklyn Academy of Music (including the Brooklyn Philharmonic and 651 Kings Majestic Corporation), Brooklyn Museum and Brooklyn Botanic Garden all seek to keep up with the changing population and work force of Brooklyn and already attract significant numbers of young people and ethnically diverse audiences. Prospect Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, and the Brooklyn Public Library offer two more world-class institutions just 10 minutes away from Downtown Brooklyn. A new institution, the West Indian Caribbean Day Committee, sponsors the largest Mardi Gras-type festival in the world in Brooklyn, with year-round activities preparing for it, including children’s activities. But of these organizations, only BAM is centrally located in the Downtown area. Other leading arts and cultural institutions include the Brooklyn Historical Society, the NYC Transit Museum, Arts at St. Ann’s, BACA, the Rotunda Gallery and Bargemusic.

In Downtown Brooklyn, a variety of programs and initiatives have emerged which highlight the arts as a highly practical component of the revitalization plans. These include cultural tourism, public art programs, the provision of space for performances and exhibitions, capital investments in public facilities and plans to secure and beautify the environment surrounding the facilities. These efforts are not the sole domain of government, but have been implemented by private organizations as well. On Fulton Landing, events such as Bargemusic and the annual BWAC summer sculpture exhibition demonstrate how successful these activities in and around Downtown Brooklyn can be. Events arranged to appeal to a wider audience of daily visitors, such as those held during weekdays at lunch time or after working hours, have been very successful.

The Fund for the Borough of Brooklyn has acted as a facilitator, connecting artists and cultural institutions to Downtown’s Central Business District and the broader community beyond. The Fund has played a major role in creating venues for the arts throughout the Downtown area and in sponsoring events and exhibitions throughout the year. The Fund has also developed Brooklyn Community Access Television (BCAT) and the Rotunda Gallery.
Brooklyn Academy of Music is working on a master plan of its area with ideas for evening activities for many tastes, such as jazz, films, informal gathering places—generally making the whole area brightly lit and lively.

The reopening of the historic Majestic Theater, a 900-seat theater, was the first step in spreading BAM's influence to the surrounding neighborhood. The theater and its environs are now used cooperatively with the surrounding communities as a place of music, dance, discussion, public art and education. Its 651 Kings Majestic Corporation coordinates those activities and produces a variety of arts activities with Brooklyn communities. Considerable attention is paid to education as well as entertainment. The Brooklyn Philharmonic has brought programs combining music, history and cultural analysis to Pratt and Brooklyn public schools.

The Brooklyn Museum and Brooklyn Botanic Garden serve their surrounding neighborhoods. Visitor surveys indicate that 20% of those going to the Museum and 40% of those going to the Garden walk there. But half the Museum visitors and 30% of Garden visitors do come from outside of Brooklyn. (By contrast, the Metropolitan Museum gets 60% of its visitors from outside NYC.) The rest of Museum and Garden visitors are roughly divided between the rest of NYC and outside the city, the latter roughly divided between the rest of the Tri-State Metropolitan Region and tourists from farther afield, including a small percentage from abroad.

The Museum was highly rated by visitors on a scale of 1-10. The Garden survey did not ask for a rating, but the median yearly frequency of attendance per person was four visits, strongly suggesting satisfaction. Garden attendance is about 700,000 visits annually.

Both the Museum and Garden would like to relate more to Downtown corporations and activities and would be pleased to join other cultural and higher education institutions in using a joint Downtown space to promote their programs. The Museum could preview exhibitions with lectures there. The Garden already has worked with MetroTech Center on landscaping and would like to do more with Downtown Brooklyn as a whole. They would like closer relations with the higher education institutions, e.g., getting interns to work in the Garden and offering lectures or courses on botany-related topics. Forest City Ratner Companies was interested in a Museum outpost at MetroTech; BAM also would like an outpost in the area. The cost seems prohibitive (AT&T estimated the cost of a museum it was considering in its Manhattan building at nearly $1 million a year), but both the Museum and Garden would like to arrange special lunchtime events for Downtown employees. Both institutions are interested in attracting group tours from the region for joint exposure to the Museum and Garden, but they don't have the resources to arrange it systematically.

BACA and The Rotunda Gallery, a program of the Fund for the Borough of Brooklyn, bring arts exhibitions to Downtown.

Brooklyn also houses several important communities of artists—in Red Hook, Greenpoint, Williamsburg, and on the waterfront near the Manhattan Bridge. One artist-run non-profit organization is the Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition, organized to offer exhibitions. A recent BWAC exhibition attracted 6,000 visitors to the Beard Street Pier in Red Hook.

While the effort to build or enhance the role of the arts Downtown holds promise, it does require long-term commitment. Spatial constraints and lack of funding threaten to undermine some of the most successful arts programs in Downtown, such as The Arts at St. Ann's, the New Theatre of Brooklyn, and the Adaptors. The world class Brooklyn Philharmonic is available to perform in MetroTech Center and Downtown Brooklyn on a more regular basis, but needs to match the cost of any performances with the available audience. Polytechnic's Dibner Library, smaller spaces at Brooklyn Union and Chase, and a 900-seat auditorium in the NYC Technical College are possible indoor and outdoor concert venues.

The arts are an integral part of the well-being of Downtown Brooklyn. The Brooklyn Tourism Council, with a strong membership list, is one vehicle through which many cultural institutions are cooperating on marketing and promotion.
Health and Human Services

Three major health care institutions are located in or near Downtown Brooklyn: Long Island College Hospital, The Brooklyn Hospital Center and Cumberland Neighborhood Family Care Center.

Long Island College Hospital has formal relations with some MetroTech corporations, the Supreme Court and the District Attorney’s office, providing lectures and such services as inexpensive flu shots, free prostate and eye exams and alcoholism programs. A satellite health center is located at One Red Cross Plaza in Walt Whitman Park, a few blocks north of Tillary Street. The hospital serves as a 911 EMS emergency receiving station, with a cardiac center approved by the American Heart Association and a fully-equipped trauma center. Long Island College Hospital, the oldest clinical teaching hospital on Long Island, is affiliated with the State University of New York Health Science Center at Brooklyn and with Mt. Sinai Medical Center and has its own venerable nursing school. Its equipment includes a high-energy linear accelerator for cancer and a machine that dissolves kidney stones. It has the only hospital-based rape crisis center in Brooklyn. It is the fifth largest employer in Brooklyn. A large proportion of its medical staff have private offices in the vicinity of Downtown.

The Brooklyn Hospital Center has just entered a partnership with NYU Medical School. It was wooed by many medical schools because it has specialized in the medical field most sought after now, primary care and preventive medicine. In addition, Brooklyn Hospital has nationally recognized specialties, including a fertility clinic, cardiology and internal medicine. The hospital added 300 employees in 1994 at all skill levels. Doctors are willing to come from outside the region because the staff is excellent. Residency applications are up because of the turn toward family practice. Most new employees (other than doctors) come from the neighborhood. The hospital has extensive outreach in the residential neighborhoods but little in Downtown. The head of marketing acknowledged that the hospital would like to make connections with a Downtown Brooklyn corporation and that they should turn their marketing toward Downtown. They recognize their links to Downtown (visitors and staff want more restaurants and stores nearby) and want to be included in plans for Downtown Brooklyn improvement. The Brooklyn Hospital Center is moving into buildings toward Downtown as it expands, it is beginning to build a 17-story residence for staff adjacent to the Hospital overlooking Fort Greene Park.
Transportation

As an integral part of the Tri-State Metropolitan Region’s Central Business District, Downtown Brooklyn’s business, government, cultural and retail sectors make it a major regional destination. An analysis from the NYC Department of City Planning of the mass transit ridership revealed that approximately 250,000 people commute to Downtown Brooklyn each day. Of these, 120,500 people arrive by the subway, 17,000 by Long Island Railroad, 40,000 by bus, 4,400 by foot and 67,300 (27%) by car. In addition to the workers, shoppers and people involved with the courts, there are over 32,000 students (high school and college) and 105,789 residents in the area. The Fulton Mall Improvement Association estimates that about 100,000 people are on the Mall daily, mostly from Brooklyn’s Fort Greene, Bedford-Stuyvesant and Crown Heights communities. These population figures will increase with the construction of Atlantic Center and the proposed new courthouses.

According to the MetroTech Transportation Access Survey, the commuter’s median travel time to MetroTech Center is 49 minutes. The residents of the MetroTech employees surveyed were the following: 41% from Brooklyn, 14% from Queens, 9% from Manhattan; 5% from The Bronx, 7% from Staten Island, 5% from Long Island, 6% from other New York State counties, and 11% from New Jersey. According to the Department of City Planning, MetroTech Center has a higher percentage of its workers coming from Long Island, Westchester, Staten Island and New Jersey than do the traditional employers in Downtown Brooklyn, which draw more from Brooklyn and Queens.

Downtown Brooklyn is well served by mass transit. Fourteen subway lines and the Long Island Rail Road link Downtown Brooklyn with other areas of Brooklyn and with Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens and Long Island. Of Downtown’s 16 stations, six are interconnected—three at Borough Hall and three at Atlantic Avenue. The latter also connects with the Long Island Rail Road Atlantic Avenue Terminal. Court Street/Borough Hall is Downtown’s busiest station, ranking 23rd of all the 425 New York City subway stations in turnstile counts, with an average of 27,342 daily passengers entering at that station in 1994. The Atlantic Avenue station ranks 36th, with 18,263 passengers. Also, Downtown has a confluence of some 17 bus routes.

Despite the abundance of bus service, subway lines and stations in Downtown Brooklyn, the system does little to facilitate travel within Downtown. Although it is possible to take the bus or to use the 2,3,4 or 5 or the M, N or R lines between Atlantic Avenue and the Civic Center or Fulton Mall areas, it appears that few people are willing to pay an entire fare for such a short trip or go down into subway stations and wait for a train. A large number of people arriving in Downtown Brooklyn by various mass
transit modes (LIRR, subways, buses) must walk long distances to reach their final destinations. Some offices and institutions are outside of Downtown proper, such as the offices at Fulton Landing and Long Island College Hospital, at the western end of Atlantic Avenue.

While walking short distances can be a pleasant and healthy activity, the distance people choose to walk depends on the ambiance of the area. When the streets are overcrowded with pedestrians and automobiles, traffic regulations are ignored, weather conditions are adverse or the route is ugly or frightening, people limit their walking distances.

Because of its strategic location, river crossings and regional toll policy, the Borough of Brooklyn acts as a "land bridge" for regional transportation movement, much of which comes through the Downtown area bound for other destinations. Four major roadways carry large volumes of traffic through the Downtown between Manhattan and other points in Brooklyn, Staten Island and the rest of the region.

- Adams Street/Boerum Place: A six-lane (two-way) roadway from Atlantic Avenue to the Brooklyn Bridge access ramp, flanked by a service and parking road between Joralemon and Tillary streets running in a north-south direction.

- Flatbush Avenue: four-six moving lanes (two-way) from Atlantic Terminal to the Manhattan Bridge access ramp running north-south. This is a major regional truck route.

- Atlantic Avenue: four moving lanes (two-way) from Atlantic Terminal to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway running east-west.

- Tillary Street: a six-lane (two-way) roadway from Cadman Plaza West to the BQE access ramp running east-west.

The Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, a six-lane limited access interstate highway, skirts the edge of Downtown Brooklyn, Cobble Hill, Brooklyn Heights, Fulton Landing, Vinegar Hill and Fort Greene. There are entrance and exit ramps into Downtown at Atlantic Avenue, the Brooklyn Bridge and Tillary Street.

The balance between public space for pedestrians and motor vehicle traffic in Downtown Brooklyn is a critical issue. Downtown's pedestrians are shortchanged—squeezed onto narrow sidewalks while preference is given to motor vehicles traveling through to other destinations. According to a Department of City Planning pedestrian study, the intersection of Adams Street with the Fulton Street Mall is especially dangerous for the 4,340 pedestrians who cross Adams Street in an average weekday hour. Adams Street is a very wide 130 foot street, yet pedestrians have only 20 seconds out of a 120 second cycle to cross the street. According to the 1985 Highway Capacity Manual, the minimum recommended time to cross a street this wide is 32 seconds—4 feet per
second. It is almost impossible to cross the street in one cycle and numerous pedestrians are caught on the narrow traffic islands in the middle of the street while traffic speeds by. This may explain why there were 61 accidents involving pedestrians in 1990 and 42 accidents in 1992. According to the Department of City Planning report, the other dangerous crossings occur at Boerum Place, Adams Street in front of the Renaissance Plaza site and Court Street at Joralemon. Our own observations have concluded that Cadman Plaza West at the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway crossing and Flatbush Avenue in front of Long Island University (a popular unauthorized crossing) are extremely hazardous. In general, if traffic permits, vehicles travel at high speeds along Downtown's main roads (Flatbush Avenue, Cadman Plaza West and Adams Street/Boerum Place), compounding the hazards for pedestrians.

According to the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC), on a single weekday roughly 100,600 cars and trucks (carrying 144,000 people) use Downtown's roadways to cross the East River over the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges. Using the same car/person ratio, the Downtown's daily commuting population of 67,300 represents about 47,000 cars. Allowing for an additional 10,000 cars and trucks for service or visiting purposes, there are some 57,000 cars entering and staying in Downtown Brooklyn each day. Therefore, approximately two-thirds of the vehicles entering Downtown Brooklyn are passing through, using the roads through Downtown as land bridges to other destinations. And finally, the number of cars and trucks passing through Brooklyn on their way to the East River crossings is higher than the traffic going in the opposite direction. The reason for this could be traced to the regional vehicular traffic pattern which crosses the Verrazano Bridge in the toll-free (Brooklyn-bound) direction, and encourages drivers to find other routes to return rather than pay the $6.00 toll in the outbound direction. This regional traffic condition through the heart of Downtown will only worsen as proposed reconstruction work begins on the Gowanus Expressway.

The "land bridge" issue extends to Brooklyn's Long Island Railroad station as well. According to the Department of City Planning, a large number of people take the subway between the Atlantic Avenue station and Lower Manhattan—a full 35.4% of the subway passengers exiting at Atlantic Avenue on weekdays got on in Lower Manhattan, compared with only 13.4% at Court Street/Borough Hall and only 3.2% at Jay Street/Borough Hall. This large number of trips between Lower
Manhattan and Atlantic Avenue is probably attributable to Long Island commuters working in Manhattan—7,600 of them who use the station to transfer between the Long Island Railroad and the subways during a 24-hour period. In this case, the only penalty to Downtown Brooklyn is subway crowding for the short distances between Atlantic Terminal and Nevins Street or Borough Hall stops (and for Brooklyn commuters to Lower Manhattan), which exacerbates the deficient peak hour subway service across the East River. Some of these commuters may patronize Atlantic Center’s new stores.

According to a study conducted by Habib/Bodouva for the MetroTech BID, the construction of Atlantic Center, Renaissance Plaza, 330 Jay Street and the expansion of Downtown’s court facilities will contribute to a large increase in subway passengers. By the time those projects are complete, aggregate arrivals at Downtown’s stations are expected to increase by 60%. This translates into an estimated 100,000-120,000 new trips each weekday, an increase in passengers equal to those of entire public transportation systems of Miami and Seattle combined.

Major long-term capital investment programs in public transit, other transportation modes and environmental systems have successfully begun to meet deferred maintenance and rehabilitation needs over the past decade, and in so doing have delivered an economic stimulus to the region. However, further progress is jeopardized by reductions in federal and State funds. With the movement in Washington toward devolution of government responsibilities, at least in the short run the region needs to develop its own investment strategy and the means to finance it with declining guidance and support from the federal government. Currently, public sector expenditures in the region from state and local government, excluding infrastructure spending, total approximately $80 billion. In addition, RPA estimates from available agency data that the region spends an additional $12 billion annually on infrastructure investments. Transportation expenditures—which are weighted heavily in favor of highway maintenance and construction—dominate the region’s capital budget.

While Downtown is blessed with superb subway and regional rail infrastructure, many of the area’s transit stations are in disrepair. According to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), the following stations have been rehabilitated or construction is underway: DeKalb Avenue (phase 1 was completed in 1982), Clark Street (1982-86), Borough Hall (4 and 5 lines, 1982-86), Nevins Street (1992-96). Borough Hall (2 and 3 lines) is now accessible to people with disabilities. The following stations will be made accessible by the year 2010: DeKalb Avenue, Atlantic Terminal, and Jay Street/Borough Hall.

The MTA planned to award a construction contract for the rehabilitation of the Jay Street station in 1996, but the project was deferred as fiscal constraints led to a $500 million reduction in New York City’s contribution to MTA’s Capital Plan. The MTA is in the process of selecting a firm to design the reconstruction of the Atlantic Avenue LIRR Terminal complex. Having Brooklyn’s priority transit projects put into later and later budget phases has become a regrettable pattern in recent years. RPA’s studies conclude that cutting back on infrastructure investments is a threat to the city and region’s economy. This is especially true in Downtown Brooklyn, which should be treated as part of the Central Business District, the core of the region’s economy.

Though the trend is toward cuts in infrastructure investments, still a great deal will be done, from repairing (or finding transit alternatives to) the Manhattan Bridge to upgrading Downtown’s subway stations. A major effort is needed to accelerate investments in Brooklyn’s transit system. Moreover, it is important that funds are spent strategically to bolster the Downtown Brooklyn economy and quality of life. To achieve this, Downtown Brooklyn leaders will have to agree on a set of priorities and fight together to get them financed.
Urban Design

Throughout the world, there are cities whose physical qualities make them unique, memorable places. Urban design helps establish a city’s character. What is unique in the physical character of Downtown Brooklyn? Have the rapid changes in recent times created conditions that blur its unique and memorable image? The relationships between Downtown’s urban design and activity centers are critical to creating a civic whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Cadman Plaza, a linear park stretching from the Brooklyn Bridge to the steps of historic Borough Hall, lies in the heart of Downtown. Landmarked buildings—the Brooklyn Fire Headquarters, the General Post Office, Gage & Tollner Restaurant, the Dime and Williamsburgh Savings Banks and Borough Hall itself—are among the numerous residences, institutions, churches and commercial buildings that reflect what Downtown Brooklyn was like at the turn of the century. Downtown’s urban scale makes walking between the business, government, educational and many cultural centers possible. And Downtown is adjacent to residential neighborhoods that are of impressive historic, architectural and scenic beauty and interest—neighborhoods with tree-lined streets that lead to views of New York harbor and the Manhattan skyline.

Downtown has a number of well-defined centers of activity, each with a unique character, for the most part successful on its own terms. MetroTech Center, a corporate and academic complex on a 16-acre site, has been built around a 3.5 acre landscaped commons and is a cohesive, busy but peaceful campus-like setting. Two blocks away, Fulton Mall’s pedestrian-oriented, limited access transit mall exudes intense urban retail vitality for eight city blocks. On the other side of Flatbush Avenue, Long Island University has a welcoming gateway to its busy campus, where it has made a number of recent capital improvements. Brooklyn Law School and the Brooklyn Academy of Music are also unique and well-defined centers of activity.

Many of these discrete centers have private security and maintenance programs. For Fulton Mall and MetroTech, these take the form of “Special Assessment” or “Business Improvement Districts” (BIDs). Funded by a special tax
levied on district properties, these organizations provide specific quality of life improvements exclusively around MetroTech Center and the Fulton Mall. The MetroTech BID keeps streets clean and well patrolled, and crime has decreased steadily since its establishment in 1992. The Fulton Mall Improvement Association also provides such services, dealing with many times the number of visitors compared to MetroTech. These BIDs have made such a positive impact that other Downtown retail areas—such as Montague Street and Court Street—are weighing the establishment of BIDs to improve the quality of life on their streets.

Though small compared to Manhattan’s Union Square market, the Green Market in the restored Columbus Park (the continuation of Cadman Plaza in front of Borough Hall) represents a step toward transforming open space into a unifying location for a wide variety of Downtown workers and area residents. Unfortunately, the lack of physical connections between Downtown’s individual centers of activity has encouraged nondescript spaces to exist between them. Thus, its image and character are fragmented into smaller pieces, so that the sum of Downtown’s parts is less than its whole.

During the course of this project, there has been much discussion on the need to “improve the image” of Downtown Brooklyn. In these discussions, the problems of image could be traced to the unattractiveness of parts of Downtown, where a loss of respect for the public realm can be found in litter on the streets, carelessly designed facades, streets without trees, or vacant lots disguised as parking lots. And it can be traced to the feeling of insecurity that, at times, afflicts Downtown’s pedestrians, walking past shuttered stores after dark or aggressive peddlers in the day. The image of a place is closely tied to physical condition and visual perception. Downtown’s physical fabric is frayed and so its image suffers.
On the north and to the south, Downtown Brooklyn’s perimeter includes under-developed blocks with empty or under-utilized buildings and spaces. New development in these areas will have to be planned with consideration of the density and urban design of the area. Encouraging streetscaping and pedestrian-oriented retail on streets leading into Downtown could lessen the isolation perceived between Downtown and other parts of Brooklyn.

An example of this condition can be found in Downtown’s undervalued “gateways” and in the neglected physical “seams” flanking the activity centers. While Downtown Brooklyn is bounded by strongly defined elements, such as spectacular bridges to the north and brownstone neighborhoods in other directions, its “gateways”—the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, major streets and subway stops—do not provide a strong sense of entry into a distinct downtown area. The new Downtown Brooklyn streetscape guidelines and design program recognizes this, and its improvements are important steps in the right direction.

Pedestrians or motorists crossing the world famous Brooklyn Bridge, the ceremonial gateway to Downtown, come to a stop at the intersection of Adams and Tillary streets. This large-scale intersection is framed by the service entrances of large buildings facing the other way, offering no sense of arrival to Downtown Brooklyn. To the right, obscured by the Federal Building and Courthouse, is the under-utilized “green welcome mat” to the Borough of Brooklyn, Cadman Plaza, with easy access to historic Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn Heights or the Civic Center. Tourists walking across the Brooklyn Bridge have the choice of entering Downtown Brooklyn along Adams Street’s narrow sidewalks or an unmarked staircase leading under the bridge. At the Manhattan Bridge gateway, the median on six-lane Flatbush Avenue Extension has been planted with trees, but the first image of Brooklyn is still not welcoming.

Some of the physical seams between activity centers and along the perimeter of Downtown have become blighted places. As the activity centers focus on improving the quality of their areas—such as through the Business Improvement Districts—they may isolate the areas which are not included. Yet, in some cases these strategic parks and streets, which act as seams between Downtown’s centers of activity, have potential as important unifying elements. If developed to their potential, they could begin to weave Downtown’s frayed urban fabric together. In some cases, the seams listed below function adequately, but fail to link neighboring areas. In the worst cases, these fringe areas are characterized by litter, vacant lots or wide, spiritless streets.

Willoughby Street, Downtown’s only clear sight line to the prominent Fort Greene Park Monument overlooking Downtown, links a number of Downtown centers as it runs along their edges—Fort Greene Park and neighborhood, Brooklyn Hospital, Long Island University, MetroTech, Fulton Mall, the Civic Center, Brooklyn Heights and the waterfront beyond. But Willoughby Street’s identity is weak. It acts as the service entrance to both Brooklyn Hospital and Long Island University. It is cut by heavily trafficked Flatbush Avenue and bordered by parking lots and garages near the Gallery at MetroTech (formerly Albee Square Mall). It has some small stores and restaurants. It serves as the beginning of the service road to Adams Street, which stops its movement west. Willoughby Street’s potential as the magnet between the MetroTech Center and the Fulton Mall areas is undermined by the uninviting aspects of some of the north-south cross streets, such as Gold and Duffield streets.

Flanked by the active court-related facilities and the Brooklyn Heights neighborhood, Cadman Plaza Park’s strength as a clear link between the Brooklyn Bridge and the Civic Center is undercut by the presence of large roadways—Cadman Plaza West and Tillary Street—which cut it in segments and separate it from potential users.

Sections of the “feeder blocks” of Hoyt, Bond and Nevins streets, between Livingston Street and Atlantic Avenue, are undeveloped and can be forbidding in appearance, particularly in the evening hours. They cut off the brownstone neighborhoods to the south from Downtown.

Boerum Place, a six-lane extension of Adams Street, is flanked in part by blind walls, parking lots and narrow sidewalks. To the south, it severs Atlantic Avenue into two distinct sections, undermining its retail continuity.

Cadman Plaza West is “Old Fulton Street,” the historic main street linking Downtown with Brooklyn’s birthplace, the Fulton Ferry Landing. The street’s present role as a resurgent entertainment and restaurant center and its potential as a Brooklyn “Heritage Trail” is undermined by its width, its nondescript image, and the lack of connection between its two sides—Brooklyn Heights and Cadman Plaza Park. Finally, this historic link acts as a Brooklyn-Queens Expressway access road, with hazardous pedestrian crossings against traffic speeding between the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and the Brooklyn Bridge.
New street signs, Downtown Brooklyn

A wide and busy thoroughfare between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, Tillary Street acts as a deadening factor in Downtown. Its featureless sidewalks border the otherwise active Westinghouse High School and New York City Technical College. For cars leaving the Borough via the Brooklyn Bridge from points east, Tillary Street leaves the last impression of Brooklyn. In the same area, Vinegar Hill and the Farragut Houses development are isolated by the access ramps to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway.

Fulton Street east of Flatbush Avenue has undergone some positive changes, including the conversion of the former Strand Theater into the Urban Glass Workshop and facilities for Brooklyn Community Access Television. The street is also home to the BAM Majestic Theater. However, the barren environment which remains leaves BAM disconnected from Downtown Brooklyn.

The Long Island Railroad facility at Atlantic Terminal is one of the most prominent gateways to Downtown Brooklyn, but unfortunately it remains in a dilapidated state.

The prominent site of Renaissance Plaza (under construction) lies between Adams Street and MetroTech Center. This location straddles one of the few strongly defined east/west axes and view corridors through Downtown, linking the courts with MetroTech Commons and Fort Greene’s Myrtle Avenue. Its development as an office/hotel complex will have a positive impact on Adams Street, Jay Street and the surrounding area.

The park at the intersection of Joralemon and Adams streets occupies an important corner between Borough Hall and the State Supreme Court. From here, Cadman Plaza stretches to the Brooklyn Bridge while Willoughby Street leads to the prominent monument in Fort Greene Park. Brooklyn Law School, MetroTech Center, Fulton Mall and Brooklyn Heights are several steps in each direction.

Despite Downtown Brooklyn’s historic assets and improvements to the quality of public spaces during the last decade’s progress, obstacles remain to achieving the cohesive character necessary to securing a strong competitive position in the Tri-State Metropolitan Region. Weaving Downtown’s activity centers together can only be accomplished step-by-step over a period of time. But in the long term, if not overcome, these obstacles will prevent Downtown from reaching its true potential.
Downtown Brooklyn has all the ingredients of a great downtown, one that could act as a model for redevelopment and growth for many communities and historic downtowns in the region and the country: a ceremonial entrance via the Brooklyn Bridge to a civic park and historic Borough Hall; seven institutions of higher education; world-class cultural institutions; an active pedestrian-oriented retail area; a state-of-the-art office and academic complex; headquarters of major government agencies and federal and state courts; a commuter rail system and unparalleled public transit access; and surrounded by a diverse population and historic brownstone neighborhoods.

These ingredients need to be brought together through infrastructure connections, institutional cooperation and other initiatives to help Downtown capitalize on its strengths, including its vital location at the center of the Tri-State Metropolitan Region and inclusion in the region's Central Business District. Despite the potential of Downtown Brooklyn to offer all the amenities an employee, student and resident might want, there is considerable expression of dissatisfaction among these groups, mostly centered around the need to improve the image of Downtown Brooklyn. The problems of image have been traced to perceptions of a lack of activities and safety on streets at night, poor connections and design in the urban fabric, and a limited set of choices for retail and dining that does not reflect Downtown Brooklyn's diverse needs.

The recommendations below are the result of a year of research and analysis and hundreds of interviews, public meetings and committee discussions. They are divided into two categories—General Goals and Specific Recommendations. While the recommendations are not listed in priority order, short-term goals for real improvements have been identified. The recommendations include certain proposals for Downtown Brooklyn that have already been approved but are part of the overall plan that RPA is proposing.

Specific priorities should be established through the ongoing process of community input and dialogue that has been initiated by this study. These recommendations can be refined through a Community Questionnaire and volunteer committees working under the auspices of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce and the Brooklyn Borough President's Office. These activities should generate input that will help the study's sponsors prioritize the recommendations.
Specific Recommendations

Make Downtown Brooklyn a vibrant 24-hour community with an exciting mix of activities.

Almost all downtowns in the United States are desolate at night, caught in a downward spiral which makes people afraid to walk the streets, deters activities and breeds more emptiness. A Downtown Brooklyn hotel is one important ingredient to bringing activity and light during nighttime, but strategies will require concurrent commitments from multiple sources to have a major effect on Downtown Brooklyn’s nightlife.

While many of the students of the area’s higher educational institutions are adults working their way through college or a professional degree, many do have an interest in activities that could be provided—a cafe, a bookstore, an athletic facility—by a centrally located student center. The combined value of additional students in Downtown Brooklyn during the nighttime and the strengthened ability of educational institutions to attract more resident students makes the cost of such as facility worthwhile.

- In the short term, improve security and perceptions of safety by coordinating security efforts of Downtown BIDs and improving lighting along pedestrian routes.
- Increase opportunities for “after-hours” entertainment and support efforts by cultural and educational institutions to provide facilities to programming for greater nighttime activities. For example, encourage BAM’s film center project along with its development of the “BAM cultural/entertainment district.”
- Design and build the new Downtown Brooklyn hotel so that it serves as a beacon of light and activity during the nighttime.
- Pursue development of a “University Center” as central as possible to all Downtown Brooklyn campuses that offers facilities for athletic, recreational and cultural activities, along with meeting places.
- Support the development of dormitory facilities for students and staff of Downtown Brooklyn colleges and universities.
- Consider the development of a public facility in Downtown to promote cultural and educational activities and resources and provide information, discount theater tickets and a “Culture Pass” for Brooklyn activities.
- Establish a fixed-post presence for the 84th Precinct or adjacent to Fulton Mall to create a more permanent, localized NYPD presence.
- Provide transportation to evening activities, such as offering taxi service, adjusting bus routes and bus, subway and LIRR schedules, and assuring safe parking lots. Modify existing services to better link centers of activity.
- Since they are 24-hour facilities, support the expansion of Downtown Brooklyn hospitals, especially staff residences.
- Expand and publicize evening automobile access on the Fulton Mall.

Improve the physical environment and appearance of Downtown Brooklyn, creating connections between activity centers.

The physical environment plays a critical role in persuading people and businesses to locate to an area and encouraging people to walk between various activities. While Downtown Brooklyn has many urban design strengths to build on, too much of the area is neglected and fragmented. Well-designed connections between activities can increase pedestrian activity. Where distances are greater than most people will walk, transportation within the Downtown area should be affordable, convenient and accessible.

Vacant buildings are detrimental to the environment and economy. Downtown Brooklyn should work with the Empire State Development Corporation, New York City’s Economic Development Corporation, owners and lenders to maintain high occupancy of Court Street and Livingston Street office buildings, especially those considered to be technically old and deficient.

- In the short term, establish effective and consistent enforcement of quality of life violations that tarnish the image and atmosphere of Downtown Brooklyn.
- Publicize the assets of Downtown Brooklyn’s older commercial buildings and provide building-wide services that individual offices cannot afford. Strategies should include:
  - Incubator centers offering joint services.
  - Professional suites, non-profit headquarters, residential conversions and other new uses.
  - Financial incentives for upgrading.
- Encourage the BIDs serving Fulton Mall and MetroTech Center to continue to work hand-in-hand to increase cleanliness in the Downtown area.
- Improve the storefronts and commercial facades of Downtown Brooklyn streets. Provide 24-hour protection from graffiti and develop an assistance program to support the use of “see-through” roll-down gates instead of “solid” storefront security gates, or commission murals on solid gates.
• Encourage the development or temporary use of vacant sites that blight their surrounding area, such as on Court Street between Schermerhorn and State streets and the parking lots on Schermerhorn Street.

• Improve the pedestrian environment by widening narrow sidewalks and marking street crossings, particularly on Boerum Place and Adams, Livingston and Tillary streets. Improve streets that serve as “feeder streets” to Fulton Mall from the south, by means of street lighting, street furniture and uniform materials and colors recommended in the Downtown Brooklyn Streetscape Study.

• Improve parking garages and lots in Downtown Brooklyn. Encourage the City of New York and other garage owner/operators to improve the security and condition of their facilities.

• Develop a Brooklyn Historic Trail to link points of interest and publicize Downtown Brooklyn’s identity.

• Create inviting pedestrian and bicycle access to the heart of Downtown Brooklyn. Provide parking for bicycles.

• Examine the feasibility of a shuttle transit service, such as a “Downtown Brooklyn Bus Loop” featuring a distinctive, energy-efficient vehicle powered by electricity or natural gas with an attractive appearance and affordable price. To test the service, arrange bus trips from employment clusters and college campuses to destinations such as the cultural institutions and the waterfront during lunchtime and after work.

• Encourage the development of ferry service supported by parking lots and bus service to Downtown Brooklyn via appropriate locations on the nearby waterfront.

Promote a diversity of stores and restaurants to better satisfy Downtown Brooklyn employees and residents of nearby communities.

Downtown employees and residents of surrounding neighborhoods have expressed dissatisfaction with the shopping available in Downtown Brooklyn, despite the busy and profitable Fulton Mall. Retailing that appeals to people already in Downtown would contribute to the area’s attractiveness for business and other activities. This unsatisfied demand seems great enough to attract new stores and services, in addition to providing incentive for improvements in existing retail establishments. There is opportunity for additional retailing in the Downtown area: recent studies indicate that a large amount of potential shoppers’ dollars currently flow out of New York City.

Fulton Mall is the area’s traditional shopping center and could be improved in quality, appearance and customer service. The Mall already has several national and regional chain stores which can stake their reputations on a promise of decent service, merchandise and prices. Willoughby Street and several cross streets close to MetroTech offer additional retail space for new stores.

• In the short term, clear illegal vendors from sidewalks that are too congested, for example along Jay Street between Willoughby and Fulton streets, and on the Fulton Mall itself.

• Foster retail development in the Willoughby Corridor in conjunction with the streetscape improvements currently underway.

• Encourage the development of new restaurants, particularly in the proposed BAM cultural district and along Willoughby Street, and publicize information about existing restaurants of high quality.

• Support the commercial revitalization of Myrtle Avenue.

• Complete retail development at Atlantic Terminal.

Allocate city, state and federal resources to continue substantial investment in Downtown Brooklyn.

Downtown Brooklyn has tremendous potential to attract new jobs because it has the two strongest business assets the city offers: public transit and a compact downtown, maintained by a long history of public and private investment. Downtown Brooklyn is part of the Tri-State Metropolitan Region’s Central Business District, the world’s foremost financial center. Yet its image prevents some businesses from exploring a Downtown Brooklyn location. Investments that will improve that image are well spent in support of economic development. Cultural and educational institutions and businesses that locate in Downtown Brooklyn benefit the entire borough and city, providing people and resources that might otherwise leave the city and region altogether.

Government disinvestment, whether in the form of decreased capital spending on public transit or proposals to move existing agencies to distant locations, would greatly weaken Downtown Brooklyn’s attractiveness to new businesses, weakening the entire city’s economy. The Tri-State Metropolitan Region has a stake in its downtowns, and Downtown Brooklyn has particular qualities that allow it to succeed. But concentrated public policies are required.

• In the short term, capital projects needing immediate funding include:
  – Renovation of the LIRR Terminal and subway stations at Atlantic Center.
  – Continued TA improvements to other Downtown Brooklyn subway stations.
A public/private partnership to expand and complete the street lighting, uniform street elements and amenities of the Downtown Brooklyn Streetscape Project to include Livingston Street, Myrtle Avenue, Flatbush Avenue and other streets.

- Completion of affordable housing construction at Atlantic Center.
- Completion of federal and state court facilities construction within easy reach of existing law firms and other court-related services.

- Maintain government agencies’ commitment to offices and facilities in Downtown Brooklyn. Resist efforts to move current government functions out of Downtown.
- Begin a public planning process for future use and development of vacant and under-utilized property south of the Fulton Mall.

Expand partnerships between Downtown Brooklyn's higher education institutions and area businesses to create job opportunities and economic growth.

Downtown Brooklyn’s higher education institutions present an opportunity to promote economic expansion of the borough. Already, they are working with businesses—conducting research, providing training and consultation, and educating employees of nearby firms. But representatives of these educational institutions agree that they could enlarge their business partnerships and use their services to attract more jobs to Brooklyn.

Educational institutions and business should also promote new programs to encourage lifelong learning, whereby employees are continually engaged in an educational process that enables them to adapt to the new employment requirements of a changing economy.

- Establish a consortium of representatives of Downtown Brooklyn higher education business programs engaged in research and training to:
  - Share the cost of publicity and outreach to expand their programs.
  - Establish a reputation for Downtown Brooklyn as a place where business assistance from the academic community is available and effective.
  - Form joint research and training programs and maintain curricula that fit business needs.

Provide support to business incubators near Downtown.

- Coordinate higher education and cultural institutions to facilitate communication with the business community and organize cooperative programs.
- Encourage Downtown Brooklyn employees to take advantage of nearby educational opportunities that improve the quality of the local workforce. Promote institutional connections between employers and higher educational institutions to develop programs of continuous learning targeted to these employees.

Encourage use of the recently established Small Business Information Center at the Brooklyn Business Library.

Promote greater coordination of Downtown Brooklyn's communities and institutions to implement these recommendations.

Business leaders and Borough President Howard Golden's office are among Downtown Brooklyn's strongest assets. But enhanced connections among major downtown institutions would greatly improve chances of implementing these recommendations. A structured organization would provide greater continuity of the leadership coalitions that Downtown Brooklyn will require.

- Formalize the working relationships between the leaders of Downtown Brooklyn business and institutions under the auspices of the Borough President and Chamber of Commerce, including the heads of major corporations, small businesses, the higher education institutions, cultural institutions, hospitals, religious organizations, the major government agencies in Downtown, and elected officials.
- Reorganize an association of heads of higher education institutions and major cultural organizations.
- Organize a campaign to publicize Downtown Brooklyn's assets, targeting prospective employers and investors who may be unaware of Downtown Brooklyn's strengths.
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